

KEY CONCEPTS IN THE THEORETICAL WORKS OF
GEORGES BATAILLE

By

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by

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PREFACE

There are some works which enchant us, delight us, others which question and solicit us, making the ground tremble and give way from under our feet. To speak of the first leads quickly to chattering and paraphrasing. To speak of the second leads perhaps as quickly to silence, to muteness. But perhaps it leads also to the need to respond to the provocation that these works address to us.

The role of this provocation in Bataille's work, however, is not measurable. For, in fact, the provocation and the work are interchangably superimposed. Finally, the provocation is nothing other than the work itself, and, in that respect, inevitable, impossible to avoid.

To speak of provocation in regard to Bataille is not to proceed without danger. We think immediately of the "will of effect," of scandal, of a somewhat gratuitous or secondary undertaking. To the contrary, it appears very clearly to whoever really reads Bataille that nothing is less gratuitous, nothing more necessary, than these rare texts, however numerous (the volumes accumulate under our eyes), that he addresses to us, or, more precisely, that he addresses to the part of ourselves which, beyond the habits of daily life, is still able to be put into play.

But if the provocation which touches Bataille's reader is such, it is without any doubt above all--and it is necessary to underline

if from the beginning--that Bataille's texts constitute nothing less than his own bringing into play of all the various concepts in his universe. That which is played in Bataille's work, what is played in him under the sign of madness, is a fundamental experience which can be formulated thusly: To write madness is to write in order not to be mad.

This is very clearly stated in the beginning of Sur Nietzsche: "Ce qui m'oblige d'écrire, j'imagine est la crainte de devenir fou."¹ This madness, however, is not simple. It is not in any case non-sense. It is, rather, the excess, perhaps even the trace even of the overflowing of meaning and sense.

From the first degree of this madness, and from its resolution by writing, the last hope, certain texts of Bataille tell of the banal but moving existence. Thus these sentences from L'Abbé C.: "J'écirais ma part du récit, et porterais les pages écrites à chaque séance. C'était l'élément essentiel d'un traitement psychothérapique, sans lequel j'aurais du mal à m'en sortir" (Oeuvres complètes, t.III, p. 251).

Therapeutic writing, which is at the same time writing leading to madness, is therefore what concerns the reader as well as the critic. For if we have what Nietzsche calls the art of not dying from the truth, that means we also have the art of telling the truth. From that moment, trapped in discourse, the mouth is no longer able to close. It would stifle, too much pressure would pulverize it if it could not say sense or meaning, and also this excess, which ceaselessly prolongs it.

That is why writing is this moving and uncertain edge which makes the writer lightly touch madness, and causes him to live in its orb. To run more quickly than madness--to write--is therefore, the only conclusion, the only solution which permits escaping a galloping ascendancy of madness. It is in this sense that Kafka writes, with the certitude of someone who has proof of it, that "un écrivain qui n'écrit pas est un non-sens, une provocation à la folie."² It is in this sense that he affirms: "l'existence de l'écrivain dépend vraiment de sa table de travail, en fait il ne lui est jamais permis de s'en éloigner s'il veut échapper à la folie, force lui est de s'y accrocher avec les dents" (Ibid., p. 449).

"S'il veut échapper à la folie . . .": To this phrase of Kafka is paired exactly that of Sur Nietzsche that we have cited. To say is necessary, to say is the necessity for Kafka as for Bataille, although Bataille is not a writer in as neurotic a fashion as Kafka. Simply Bataille has plunged into the deepest literature (and what plunge is more decisive, more vertiginous than that of Histoire de l'oeil?) and can no longer reascend. He who has thus plunged once is no longer able to escape literature. Caught between two fires ("Mais que faire? oublier? aussitôt, je le sens, je serai fou . . ." (E.I., p. 54), the writer literally can no longer pull himself out of it. The trap has closed up, firmly, pitilessly.

But the question can be considered from another angle. It can be posed very differently from the exterior. From the exterior, what do we see in a work like Bataille's? What is our perception of such a

work--a work which does not appear particularly enclosed in itself, but to the contrary multiple and diverse?

Nothing, it seems, must escape Bataille. His canvas covers all human disciplines, his writings blend all existing or foreseeable literary genres. Nevertheless, very quickly, a unique perspective emerges, which reveals to us the constancy of one thought and the obstination of one quest. Whatever the domains where this thought and this quest are exercised, they always affirm their singularity and their penetration. The same exigency is always there in the work which leads rapidly to this essential statement, that there are in Bataille's work no marginal tests, in spite of (or thanks to) these infinite efforts that Bataille does not finish undertaking in order to join this perspective of which he speaks in the conclusion to L'Erotisme, and where he says in the most precise way: "Je me représente une série de visions dans l'instant coïncidant entre elles, où mon expérience du rire, celle de l'érotisme, celle de l'extase, enfin celle de la mort s'inscrivent en une perspective unique: cette perspective a seule un sens pour moi" (E.I., p. 88).

These efforts cover an entire life. They can only accentuate an evolution, they can only be sensitive to a history (personal, social). Consequently, they are only able to orient the work in such and such a direction, they can only open the texts to such and such a particular problem. Now, what is this evolution? It is certainly evident in texts like L'Abbé C. and Ma mère which appear, in comparison to the first récits (Histoire de l'oeil, Le Bleu du ciel, Madame Edwarda), as dulled and numbed, caught in their narration. Not that one can say

they are less personal or less committed. Simply, they seem more arduous, more subdued, written perhaps with more patience, less gushing in any case, and less excitable. One finds the same elsewhere in the last essays (L'Erotisme, La Littérature et le mal, and even more so in the texts on art which succeed them). These seem, in appearance at least, to break, for example, with the snatches of fragmentary texts forming the Somme athéologique. At the end of his life, Bataille said that the ideal for him would be to write like Plato. But, he added: "Il me semble qu'il tente d'établir autant qu'il peut un édifice rationnel, et qu'il y a pourtant quelque chose au-delà. . . ." ³ We also realize that beyond differences of form or of rhythm, Bataille speaks without respite of the same things, repeats and endlessly questions the same.

Since the first articles, we have seen the presence of death, sacrifice, excess, dépense. How could we not see that if these "themes" progressively find writing the most proper form in which to become manifest, then, little by little, and without totally losing it, they seem to assume a distant position. Is it only a question of taking distance and not of some renunciation? It is particularly necessary to see that in Bataille's works the crux is not in variety but in the inevitable. Themes, obsessions, seen since the first articles, regardless of genres--novels, récits, essays--can consequently only be said to be the prime cause, the final aim of Bataille's writing, and are that which we could say briefly in one word, Bataille's "secret."

But, a secret completely betrayed. A secret that no analysis would truly be able to bring to light. For if an entire book has its

secret (Nietzsche: "N'écrit-on pas des livres, justement, pour dissimuler ce qu'on cache au fond de soi?"⁴), if the entire book is a secret, it is no less true that beyond all analysis, or all self-analysis, Bataille always keeps, like Freud's dream, an obscure point.

No one has stated this point better in the novel than Henry James nor better than Maurice Blanchot in his récits or in theory. Bataille tries to surround and speak of this obscure point, this center around which James and Blanchot never cease to revolve. Doubtlessly, then, this writing would fade away in the instant. But the word continues, this long word which does not end by finishing, which does not finish by being, and the secret flees, "au-delà de tous les mots." However, as Blanchot notes, this remains: "Une fois la page écrite, est présente dans cette page la question qui, peut-être à son insu, n'a cessé d'interroger l'écrivain tandis qu'il écrivait."⁵

Thus, this parole which is never stated, is that which makes one write in such and such a direction, that which orients writing. And this word is never stated, precisely because it is what determines this "autre parole" that is writing, precisely because, as Heidegger states it, "Il faut que ceci demeure inexprimé, parce que le mot dicible reçoit sa détermination à partir de l'indicible."⁶

According to Blanchot, "Tout se passe donc comme si la région mère de la musique eût été le seul endroit tout à fait privé de musique . . .,"⁷ as if the place where the parole is born could only be defined by its absence, its silence, its purity.

Thus, this parole which permits writing, this parole which is the possibility of writing, is in fact interdite (prohibited). Writing,

always repeating the secret, never says it. A breach always maintains it foreign to its origin, this origin that ceaselessly, in its manner, reveals and designates.

In this secret, Bataille perceives existence and all power as he writes in Sur Nietzsche: "A la fin ce qui reste inconnu, c'est ce qu'au même instant, je reconnais: c'est moi-même" (S.N., p. 108), or again in the last pages of L'Abbé C., at the end of the editor's narration, he indicates the difficulty he has in regard to tackling Charles's manuscript: "comme si cet objet cachait quelque lumière éblouissante, comme si l'on ne pouvait l'aborder sans détours, sans en déchiffrer comme une énigme les faux-semblants, quitte à s'écrier après coup:--Je me suis efforcé dans les veilles et la longue patience et, maintenant, je vois que je suis aveugle?" (O.C. t.III, p. 359). For the secret can only blind. But it can only blind perfectly the one who possesses this secret (the one who is possessed by this secret). We all, however, have our secret. That is why reducing writing and oneself to "nudité" is the only path envisaged for whoever does not wish to remain in culture, in appearance, in style, in literature. This is stated by Bataille in Madame Edwarda: "Si personne ne réduit à la nudité ce que je dis, retirant le vêtement et la forme, j'écris en vain. (Aussi bien, je le sais déjà, mon effort est désespéré: l'éclair qui m'éblouit--et qui me foudroie--n'aura sans doute rendu aveugles que mes yeux.)" (O.C. t.III, p. 28).

In Manet especially, as well as in Les Larmes d'Eros, Bataille notes that Poussin's secret appears in "une esquisse inutilisée" (L.E., p. 130). However, Bataille does not really shed light on this

secret. In regard to Manet, he remarks, in a chapter entitled precisely "Le secret," that his secret is revealed in L'Olympia, and that this revelation permits extending the perception to the entire work: "L'Olympia dévoile à nos yeux le secret de Manet. Il n'est entièrement dévoilé que dans L'Olympia, mais une fois découvert, nous en trouvons la trace un peu partout").⁸ But he adds a little further: "Mais s'il est vrai que le secret initial de Manet transparaisse dans cette Olympia que double une Vénus de la Renaissance, un secret plus profond s'avoue peut-être, que les branches de l'éventail dissimulaient, mais pour en mieux livrer la profondeur" (M., p. 121).

This was a correction of importance, which makes us realize that we all can grasp the image, the reflection of the secret, but never really its "being" (a being which is definitively a breach, a hole, a lacuna).

This is why in fact biography could not succeed even if we knew everything, even if we had all the elements in hand, as Chestov seems to want in L'Idée de Bien chez Tolstoï et Nietzsche (in Bataille's translation), where he says: "Comme toujours, l'événement le plus important et le plus significatif de la vie d'un écrivain reste un secret pour nous."⁹ No, we definitely cannot pierce the writer's secret, nor can the writer himself, "parce que," in Heidegger's blunt and definitive words, "nul penseur, de même que nul poète, ne se comprend lui-même."¹⁰

This secret is the essential. It is even the only truth of writing, and its only aim, unattainable. As Blanchot states it: "Le point central de l'oeuvre est l'oeuvre comme origine, celui que l'on

ne peut atteindre, le seul pourtant qu'il vaille la peine d'atteindre."¹¹
And this center, which attracts and reflects at the same time, is the cause of persistent repetition, and of the infinite undertaking in which the act of writing consists.

Bataille himself in L'Expérience intérieure complains, saying bitterly: "Je n'ai pas connu d'interrogation plus lassante que la mienne" (E.I., p. 227). And in La Littérature et le mal: "Auparavant, je parlerai de l'évidente monotonie des livres de Sade qui procède du parti de subordonner le jeu littéraire à l'expression d'un événement indicible" (L.M., p. 135). Repetition, monotony, these terms of Bataille which are pertinent, only confirm this affirmation of Heidegger according to which "chaque penseur pense seulement une unique pensée."¹² The affirmation which is justified when we see the most diverse elements in Bataille's work provokes the same thoughts as, when we see books like L'Erotisme or Lascaux generalize, through analyses and "objective" observations, all which was more personal in the preceding texts, and finally when Bataille states beside his difficulties in writing, that there is not any contradiction there. He also writes in the Preface to Bleu du ciel: "Comment nous attarder à des livres auxquels, sensiblement, l'auteur n'a pas été contraint?" (O.C. t.III, p. 381). That is the essential on which Bataille insists. Let us begin with the word, this word which, so often returns under his pen, which so often reappears in his vocabulary. In Manet, Bataille states: "Mais ce n'est pas l'aberration qui opposa si fortement la foule parisienne à Manet: C'est le sentiment justifié que cette peinture mettait l'essentiel en jeu" (M., p. 60). We read in La Littérature

et le mal: "La littérature est l'essentiel, ou n'est rien" (L.M., p. 8). And we may state also that words return; that they, limited in their number permit designating the "system" of the subject, the "système-Bataille," and not the "system de Bataille." In an essay on Gilles de Rais, Denis Hollier refers to "richesse et pauvreté d'un vocabulaire qui met en jeu un nombre de mots restreint mais les colore à l'excès," a description that could be applied to all Bataille's work. "System" therefore is taken in the sense that Jules Monnerot interprets it when he writes in regard to Bataille's texts: "Un système 'inconscient' d'équivalences irrationnelles permet finalement aux thèmes obsédants de se transformer les uns dans les autres par glissements successifs et déplacements d'accent."¹⁴

We see themes which untiringly unite, sentences which, from one book to another, are repetitious almost word for word, words themselves which unceasingly are repeated. These layers of writing, in spite of their appearance and perhaps their "will of diversity," all say the same, a "same" which cannot however be defined directly. This is the paradox and the difficulty of Bataille's texts. It becomes quite evident how much the concepts that little by little are coined throughout his quest are unstable, elusive, almost undefinable. It is also evident how much these concepts, far from being the instruments of a system or of a planned philosophy, are to the contrary always in movement, always operational through all the "subjects" of which they can take charge. This is why it could not be a question of summarizing Bataille (it would be absurd to summarize repetition and insistence; Bataille is not to be summarized, Bataille is to be read), nor trying to master

him. To the contrary, as Lucette Finas says: "à vouloir saisir une phrase de Bataille, on y laisse les doigts."¹⁵ This permits us to better understand, by a critical décalage, that we cannot directly grasp Bataille. It is necessary to do a comprehensive reading of Bataille.

This reading sur la tranche, or that which unites and separates writing and death, writing and silence, is that which makes transgression the very image of Bataillian thought, which makes fiction and theory seem to communicate, to replace and mask each other, and that which demonstrates writing plays in the incessant and moving passage from the known to the unknown and from the unknown to the known.

But this tranche is an emptiness and a breach. It is that which in the anguish of pre-writing triggers a certain process which can lead to the work or to the non-work, to writing or to non-writing. It is that which is necessary, if not sufficient to this true birth of writing, which without respite, places being into play. This is indeed a rare type of writing, a territory into which few writers have taken the risk of venturing. Bataille is one of these few.

In reviewing the critical literature on Bataille, I have found that in spite of an ever increasing amount of scholarship inspired by Bataille's work since 1968, no one has really attempted to study his work as a totality in all its complexity. The majority of studies are limited to one text or occasionally a number of texts, without establishing the relationships among those and the totality of Bataille's work. However, the following are among some of the more helpful studies on Bataille: L'Oeuvre insolite de Georges Bataille

by Daniel Hawley, as it does treat the majority of Bataille's works, organizing them into a religious framework offering a vue d'ensemble of the interior intellectual topography. La Prise de la Concorde is Denis Hollier's reading of an effacement of a never mentioned text as an effect of writing which converted peace, at first desired, into revolutionary discord and the après-guerre into the entre-deux-guerres. The effect of Bataillian writing for Hollier goes from rupture to rupture, and is a sort of heterological application; a production of ruins which prolongs the death of cathedrals up to the incompletion of any Somme athéologique. The broad spectrum of issues raised by the categories of the general economy has engaged Michele Richman's work, Reading Georges Bataille Beyond the Gift, in a situating process structured by an examination of dépense, heterogeneity, sovereignty, transgression, and communication as they appear in Bataille's works irrespective of genre or chronology, and complemented by a historical perspective on their impact through a series of diachronic readings. The overall emphasis is on the critical force of the general economy as estimated through the resistance mounted against it by some theoreticians and its appropriation by others. Christian Limousin, in his Bataille, approaches the writer's text by considering it a pure receptacle of mental phenomena, of instinctual movements acting in turn on this text, while producing an over-excitement of tissues, a tension of fibers, and of heterogeneous nerves, a glissement of articulations. In this text, therefore, we read the effect of psychoanalysis on literature in the perspective of an economy of phantasm. The majority of the remaining critical books and articles

on Bataille's work center on a single key concept such as transgression, the impossible, interdit, eroticism, death, non-savoir, violence, and expérience intérieure.

In the following pages, I have therefore undertaken the immense task of presenting a reading of all works of Bataille and putting into play the key concepts in what I call the Bataillian universe. In spite of the difficulty of such a task, I believe there is a need for such a comprehensive study of the placing into play of all concepts in the grey, murky universe without either beginning or end, which privileges neither a particular concept nor a rigidly fixed hierarchy of concepts, and which avoids systematization, categorization, and ultimately any distinction among genres, a point I will return to in the Conclusion.

Notes

¹ Georges Bataille, Sur Nietzsche (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 9. The following abbreviations for Bataille's works will be used: S.N. (Sur Nietzsche: Gallimard, 1967); O.C. t.III (Oeuvres complètes: Gallimard, 1971); E.I. (L'Expérience intérieure: Gallimard, 1954); L.E. (Les Larmes d'Eros: J.J. Pauvert, 1961); M. (Manet: Skira, 1955); L.M. (La Littérature et le mal: Gallimard Coll. Idées, 1968).

² Franz Kafka, Correspondance 1902-1924 (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 447.

³ Madeleine Chapsal, Quinze écrivains (Paris: Julliard, 1963), p. 15.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Par-delà le Bien et le Mal (Paris: 10/18, 1967), p. 235.

⁵ Maurice Blanchot, La Part du feu (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 305.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, t.II (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 394.

⁷ Maurice Blanchot, Le Livre à venir (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 10.

⁸ Georges Bataille, Manet (Genève: Skira, 1955), p. 88.

⁹ Léon Chestov, L'Idée de Bien chez Tolstoï et Nietzsche (Paris: Editions du Siècle, 1925), p. 203.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, Qu'appelle-t-on penser? (Paris: P.U.F., 1973), p. 175.

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, L'Espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard Coll. Idées, 1968), p. 56.

¹² Martin Heidegger, Qu'appelle-t-on penser? p. 47.

¹³ Denis Hollier, L'Arc 44, p. 77.

¹⁴ Jules Monnerot, Confluences 8 (Paris: 10/18, 1945), p. 881.

¹⁵ Lucette Finas, La Crue (Paris: Gaolimard, 1972), p. 455.

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There is a diachronic dimension to the system represented by Georges Bataille's discursive writings which is integral to the architecture of Bataille's system. The system is structured by an array of terms which are posited, often in aphoristic formulations, and subsequently discarded, repositied, or retained and repeated. The system of the mature Bataille, with its multiplicity of terms, conditions, and articulations, has a discursive density which is, in large part, the result of this series of displacements. In this regard, I have chosen to describe in depth one index of Bataille's progressive displacement of terms in an ontological direction--that of the replacement of the system "homogeneity/heterogeneity" by the system "continuity/discontinuity."

The tendency of the rejections and recuperations which characterize many present-day interpretations of Bataille's thought functions within an ideological context that may be partially understood as a reaction to the notion of closure itself in its particular resistance to discursive definition.

A multiplicity of dual oppositions structures Bataille's system. These oppositions are individually developed according to a stable, repeated configuration. The specificity of Bataille's categories is perceptible only as a function of this specialized configuration of opposition. I have, therefore, undertaken to describe certain structures of opposition found in Bataille's text, in the context of their relation to that zone of his system which may be termed "knowledge."

Maurice Blanchot has often drawn attention to the intrication of his own theoretical practice with that of Georges Bataille. The effects of this articulation are to be found in nearly all the fictional and discursive texts of both writers. I have examined one field of this conceptual encounter in the context of Blanchot's own reading of Bataille: the field of intersubjectivity.

I concluded my reading of Bataille's works and the putting into play of the key concepts in the Bataillian universe by focusing on the Bataille-system. This Bataille-system subsists in a universe which privileges neither a particular concept nor a rigidly fixed hierarchy of concepts which especially avoids systematization and categorization, and which insists on the dissolution of all genre distinctions, including that of theory and fiction.

CHAPTER I
FROM HETEROGENEITY TO CONTINUITY

There is a diachronic dimension to the system represented by Georges Bataille's discursive writings. Manifest as a changing theoretical perspective accompanying a stable thematic context, or as the displaced context of a characteristic critical gesture, this diachronic dimension is integral to the architecture of Bataille's system. The system is structured by an array of terms which are posited, often in aphoristic formulations, and subsequently discarded, repositied, or retained and repeated. The term dépense is an instance of the latter category. The play of these terms, in their totality, is not arbitrary. It is the result of a complex interaction of gestures and contexts, and it describes, over three decades, a trajectory and a momentum. The system of the mature Bataille, with its multiplicity of terms, conditions, and articulations, has a discursive density which is, in large part, the result of this series of displacements. Its beginnings may be perceived in the momentum of a critical gesture which, as early as the essays of La Critique Sociale, Documents, and Acéphale, tends to impose upon a mixture of heterogeneous vocabularies a radical ontological force. The trajectory which leads from the early Bataille to the author of La Part maudite is defined by the development of a specialized, personal vocabulary whose context is purely ontological, and whose relation to contemporary scientific and philosophical discourses is necessarily problematic.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe one index of Bataille's progressive displacement of terms in an ontological direction. This index is the replacement of the system "homogeneity/heterogeneity," as elaborated in "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (1933-4), by the system "continuity/discontinuity" of the mature Bataille.

Affectivity and Subject-Object Relations

In early articles such as "Le Langage des fleurs," "Figure humaine," "Chameau," "Abattoir," "Cheminée d'usine," "Les Ecartés de la nature," and "Le Gros orteil," Bataille addresses himself to the study of objects which are given as defying discursive definition. In each case, their defiance is considered to be the result of an affective value which cannot be reduced logically. Most often, this value is the negative value of ugliness. Bataille will note with satisfaction the reticence of science with regard to the horror or hilarity provoked by certain objects, and will speculate upon the human dimensions of such reactions, in rich concrete detail. In the case of "Le Gros orteil" (Documents, No. 6, November 1929),¹ for example, he notes that the big toe is the most human part of the human body, since it differs most, biologically, from the organs of the ape, and since it assures the rectitude of the vertical human stance. In this very function, however, the big toe is condemned to occupy the lowest sector of the body, to tread in the mud (itself an object of horror), and to be subject of "grotesque" afflictions such as corns and bunions (I, p. 201). The entire foot is the object of a "secrète épouvante," as well as a historically predominant sexual sanction which, in a country like Spain, could take the form of

"l'inquiétude la plus angoissée et ainsi la cause de crimes" (Ibid.). This erotic anguish, while not in itself exhausting the problem of "l'hilarité provoquée par la simple imagination des orteils" (I, p. 202), points to a significant coincidence of ugliness and seduction. Bataille relates the tale of a bold courtier who, in the confusion of a fire in the palace, touched the foot of the Queen. The motivation of this gesture is given as "la laideur et . . . l'infection représentées par la bassesse du pied" (p. 203). "Une reine étant a priori un être plus idéal, plus éthéré qu'aucun autre, il était humain jusqu'au déchirement de toucher d'elle ce qui ne différait pas beaucoup du pied fumant d'un soudard" (pp. 203-4).

Bataille's allusion to the specificity of "humanity," in a thematic context which will be characteristic of him throughout his life, is made with a hesitation concerning its status in terms of subject-object relations. The toe, for instance, is held to have an "aspect hideusement cadavérique et en même temps criard et orgueilleux," but "la forme du gros orteil n'est cependant pas spécifiquement monstrueuse: en cela il est différent d'autres parties du corps, l'intérieur d'une bouche grande ouverte par exemple" (p. 203). The ugliness of the toe is partly, but not entirely, conferred upon it by an intentionality which is motivated according to the ambiguous index "humain." Bataille's contemporaneous texts invariably raise this question and repeat this hesitation. Only with the great beginnings of Bataille's system, "La Notion de dépense" (1933) and "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (1933-4) will a theoretical framework be developed for the elaboration of these problems.

Affectivity and Utility

"La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (La Critique Sociale, Nos. 10-11, Nov. 1933, Mar. 1934) is, at the outset, an attempt to account for the phenomenon of fascism in an experimental political-economic vocabulary. For this purpose, Bataille invokes a set of terms which is designed to situate, somewhat in the manner and under the influence of Marx, the forces which combine economically and politically to form a society. The homogeneous society, or the homogeneous sector of a given society, is based on an adherence to the concept of utility as manifested in the process of production:

La base de l'homogénéité sociale est la production. La société homogène est la société productive, c'est-à-dire la société utile. Tout élément inutile est exclu, non de la société totale, mais de sa partie homogène. Dans cette partie, chaque élément doit être utile à un autre sans que jamais l'activité homogène puisse atteindre la forme de l'activité valable en soi. Une activité utile a toujours une commune mesure avec une autre activité utile, mais non avec une activité pour soi. (I, p. 340, my emphasis)

Homogeneity is defined here as the primacy of utility, considered as a system of reference by which people or commodities are judged to have an interdependent economic relation. The "commune mesure" of which Bataille speaks is given, in the case of modern societies, as money (Ibid.). In the quotation above, the value of uselessness is defined as an estrangement from the system of reference regulated by the commune mesure, and at the same time, as value for self. Uselessness denotes a certain autonomy, with regard to the societal system of reference. This autonomy, considered as the impossibility of assimilation of a given element to the interdependence of homogeneity, is given the name heterogeneity.

Le terme même d'hétérogène indique qu'il s'agit d'éléments impossibles à assimiler et cette impossibilité qui touche à la base l'assimilation sociale touche en même temps l'assimilation scientifique. (I, p. 344)

This quotation is immediately striking, by virtue of its inclusion of science in the "world of homogeneity." In order to account for this, it is necessary for us to refer to "La Notion de dépense," published a year before "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (La Critique sociale, No. 7, Jan. 1933). In that essay, Bataille had noted that a "current practice" (I, p. 302), the "classical" principle of utility governs all discussions of human society. This practice

a théoriquement pour but le plaisir--mais seulement sous une forme tempérée, le plaisir violent étant donné comme pathologique--et elle se laisse limiter à l'acquisition (pratiquement à la production et à la conservation des biens d'une part--à la reproduction et à la conservation des vies humaines d'autre part (il s'y ajoute, il est vrai, la lutte contre la douleur dont l'importance suffit à elle seule à marquer le caractère négatif du principe du plaisir introduit théoriquement à la base. (I, pp. 302-3)

The current concept of utility, in Bataille's eyes, is defined by a primacy accorded to the idea of conservation--of goods or of human lives--and is applied reductively, in "current practice" to such specific human facts as pleasure. (Bataille's reference to the problem of pleasure, with its psychoanalytic resonances, is noteworthy here, and will be partially discussed below, in the context of the comments on the unconscious.) Each time a human question is posed in terms of utility, "il est possible d'affirmer que le débat est nécessairement faussé et que la question fondamentale est éludée" (I, p. 302). In "La Notion de dépense," Bataille adduces as evidence of this epistemological reduction a series of human comportments ("le luxe, les deuils, les guerres, les cultes, les constructions de monuments somptuaires, les jeux, les spectacles, les arts, l'activité sexuelle perverse

[c'est-à-dire détournée de la finalité génitale]"--I, p. 305) whose obvious end or desire is not acquisition or conservation, but loss, a loss which promises no possible subsidiary profit. These comportments "ont leur fin en elles-mêmes" (Ibid.). "Or, il est nécessaire de réserver le nom de dépense à ces formes improductives à l'exclusion de tous les modes de consommation qui servent du moyen terme à la production" (Ibid.). The phrase "ont leur fin en elles-mêmes," combined with Bataille's exclusion of comportments toward loss which are subsidiary to eventual profit, serves to situate dépense in the context of autonomy and value for the self.

In Bataille's eyes, comportments toward loss, in their specifically human sense, cannot be adequately treated by a logic whose principal axis of pertinence is utility, defined as conservation. Their value is autonomous, with reference to conservation. It is a value, but not a form of utility. Within "La Notion de dépense," which is for the most part an enumeration of these autonomous comportments, Bataille takes note of the theoretical problem of the "current" primacy of conservation, but does not attempt to explain it. In "La Structure psychologique du fascisme," as we have seen, this theoretical problem is inserted into the discussion of societal forces, with the statement that heterogeneity is unassimilable to science. Bataille's context becomes epistemological as well as socio-economic, and dépense as heterogeneity becomes a more radical concept.

The idea of a region of society or of human comportment which is unassimilable to the specialized comportment of scientific investigation leads us again to the context of the subject and the object. Within this context, Bataille's formulations begin to demonstrate the

hesitation which characterized his early essays. In the first place, he provides an unclear and tautological definition of "science": "La science, en effet, n'est pas une entité abstraite: elle est constamment reductible à un ensemble d'hommes vivant les aspirations inhérentes au processus scientifique" (I, p. 344). In the second place, instead of explaining these aspirations, Bataille proceeds to situate science by means of the very terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity. In this formulation, science becomes both a function and a foundation of the homogeneous world:

La science a pour objet de fonder l'homogénéité des phénomènes; elle est, en un certain sens, une des fonctions éminentes de l'homogénéité. Ainsi, les éléments hétérogènes qui sont exclus par cette dernière se trouvent également exclus du champ de l'attention scientifique: par principe même, la science ne peut pas connaître d'éléments hétérogènes en tant que tels. (I, p. 344, my emphasis)

Thus, in Bataille's text, an empirical explanation of a common term, "science," in the context of the history and philosophy of science, is not attempted. Instead, the common term acquires a special sense, as an overall Bataillian context which is not yet defined. This procedure, which will be characteristic of Bataille, forces his reader to refer, for the definition of key terms, to the totality of a developing system. In order to understand the function of science within the realm of homogeneity, we must define the function of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the development of Bataille's system.

Science is a function of the world of homogeneity, by virtue of its status as a foundation of that world. The phrase "to found the homogeneity of phenomena" has two possible meanings. Is homogeneity a quality conferred upon phenomena by "science" as a form of intentionality,

or is it a quality inherent in objects? Bataille's specific definition of the term clearly shows this ambiguity:

Homogénéité signifie . . . commensurabilité des éléments et conscience de cette commensurabilité (les rapports humains peuvent être maintenus par une réduction à des règles fixes basées sur la conscience de l'identité possible de personnes et de situations définies; en principe, toute violence est exclue du cours d'existence ainsi impliqué). (I, p. 340)

The ambiguity of this formulation is manifest in the phrases "commensurabilité des éléments et conscience de cette commensurabilité," and "l'identité possible de personnes et de situations définies." Commensurable elements are susceptible of measurement or identification by an economic system of reference. Their ontological boundaries may be fixed, and their identity circumscribed, by an intentional gesture of some kind. This reductive mode of identification, which proceeds from a certain susceptibility of phenomena (including persons), is conceived as "science," and its reduction is given as an exclusion of unassimilable "violence" from the field of its identifications. The definitions of "commensurability" as "possible identity" and "violence" as unassimilability are absent from Bataille's formulation.

Bataille's subsequent definitions of homogeneity and heterogeneity, while maintaining the ambiguity we have seen above, demonstrate that the principle of differentiation of the two terms is affectivity.

La réalité des éléments hétérogènes n'est pas du même ordre que celle des éléments homogènes. La réalité homogène se présente avec l'aspect abstrait et neutre des objets strictement définis et identifiés. . . . La réalité hétérogène est celle de la force ou du choc. Elle se présente comme une charge, comme une valeur, passant d'un objet à l'autre d'une façon plus ou moins arbitraire, à peu près comme si le changement avait lieu non dans le monde des objets, mais seulement dans les jugements du sujet. Ce dernier aspect ne signifie pas cependant que les faits observés doivent être regardés

comme subjectifs: ainsi, l'action des objets de l'activité érotique est manifestement fondée dans leur nature objective. (I, p. 347, my emphasis)

Bataille's terminology tends to safeguard an objective status for these two "realities," but the sole context of his principle of definition of the terms appears to be affectivity. He writes that "il est possible de supposer que l'objet de toute réaction affective est nécessairement hétérogène (sinon généralement, du moins, par rapport au sujet)" (I, p. 346), and he specifically re-defines "incommensurability" in terms of affectivity: "L'existence hétérogène peut être représentée . . . comme tout autre, comme incommensurable, en chargeant ces mots de la valeur positive qu'ils ont dans l'expérience affective" (I, p. 348).

The ambiguity resulting from a formulation of homogeneous and heterogeneous "realities" which depends upon the term of affectivity, will not be resolved by Bataille in his essay. Instead, the problem of a heterogeneous "reality" will be subsumed by a series of propositions which are concentrated upon the intentional or perceptual function of subjectivity. The problem of objective reality, considered as an existent comprised of regions, will be subsumed by the proposition that "science cannot know heterogeneous elements as such," posited as a statement about subjectivity. Homogeneous and heterogeneous realities will become secondary to the duality of science and science's "other" as integral functions of a subject's intentionality. "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" will become an essay on subjectivity.

Bataille declares that "il est possible de parler de la nature violente et démesurée d'un cadavre en décomposition" (I, p. 347). This statement, considered as a description of a necessary relationship

between subjectivity and objective reality, functions as a reinscription of the homogeneous and heterogeneous worlds as functions of intentionality. The term "science" stands for the first of these functions, and the second function will be described by an "other" of science which will have several names: the unconscious ("l'exclusion des éléments hétérogènes hors du domaine homogène de la conscience, rappelle . . . d'une façon formelle celle des éléments décrits (par la psychanalyse) comme inconscients, que la censure exclut du moi conscient" (I, p. 344)); the mystical thought of primitive peoples; and dream representations:

Il est facile de constater que--la structure de la connaissance d'une réalité homogène étant celle de la science--celle d'une réalité hétérogène en tant que telle se retrouve dans la pensée mystique des primitifs et dans les représentations du rêve: elle est identique à la structure de l'inconscient. (I, p. 347, my emphasis)

Bataille's quasi-metaphorical descriptions of two functions of intentionality permit the description of a cultural repression which itself clarifies the need for metaphoricity:

Si l'on admet cette conception, étant donné ce qui est connu sur le refoulement, il est d'autant plus facile de comprendre que les incursions faites dans le domaine hétérogène n'aient pas encore été suffisamment coordonnées pour aboutir même à la simple révélation de son existence positive et clairement séparée. (I, p. 344)

The concept of a cultural repression, which would not be accidental, but would be the result of a duality inherent in consciousness, is the first significant result of the interplay of Bataille's terms and contexts. The very existence of the heterogeneous world is given as a fact repressed by the culture of productivity. The primacy accorded to the homogeneous world, by a certain intentional gesture of subjectivity, has as an integral part of its constitution a rejection of the

affective world of heterogeneity. The traces of this rejection, or repression, have already been mentioned: the bias of "current practice" toward utility as a context for all human behavior; the reductive vision of pleasure as a struggle against pain; the refusal to envisage compartments toward loss. Subjectivity's rejection of its own affective function gives rise to a necessarily reductive form of intellection "science" or "current practice." The domain to which this form of intellection is blind is further characterized by Bataille in terms of a fundamental duality:

Le monde hétérogène comprend l'ensemble des résultats de la dépense improductive. . . . Ceci revient à dire: tout ce que la société homogène rejette soit comme déchet, soit comme valeur supérieure transcendante. (I, p. 346, my emphasis)

The structural duality of the pure and the impure is familiar to any reader of Bataille. Its appearance in the context of heterogeneity is one example of a relatively continuous thematic context, accompanied by a constantly changing theoretical perspective, in Bataille's thought. Thus, the seductive ambiguity of the Queen's foot finds a context in the homogeneous world, as an upsurge of heterogeneity.

Affect Opposed to Affect

Affect founds the world of heterogeneity. A reaction against affect, integral to the functioning of subjectivity, represses this world in favor of a homogeneous world. The former world, repressed by the latter, is given by Bataille an ontological priority:

L'étude de l'homogénéité et de ses conditions d'existence conduit . . . à l'étude essentielle de l'hétérogénéité. Elle en constitue d'ailleurs la première partie en ce sens que la première détermination de l'hétérogénéité définie comme non

homogène suppose la connaissance de l'homogénéité qui la délimite par exclusion. (I, pp. 343-4, my emphasis)

The study of homogeneity, given the history of the "culture of utility," has an epistemological priority over the study of repressed heterogeneity. But the ontological priority of heterogeneity is the priority of the repressed to the act of repression.

The context of repression is the stage for a critical gesture which will be characteristic of Bataille: the gesture by which two terms which apparently exclude each other violently are placed in a relationship of mutual conditioning. The world of homogeneity is a world founded upon the exclusion of the heterogeneous element. This reductive world requires the priority of that which it reduces. Moreover, the reduction which exploits a "possible identity" of objects is never entirely effective. This fact is testified to by the many instances of dépense, and by a perpetual affective "possibility" which characterizes many objects. Thus, the biologically dissected innocence of the big toe is accompanied, in the world of subjectivity, by a certain inescapable "écarquillement des yeux" before the same object. Heterogeneity, as an integral part of intentionality, cannot be banished by the secondary reaction which founds homogeneity. This configuration is roughly analogous to some of the major philosophical distinctions made in the early part of the twentieth century, such as the Freudian "return of the repressed," the Surrealist vision of objects, or the drawing of attention by Heidegger to a rupture of the objectal relation of utility. But as Bataille compresses his terms into a relation of intimate interdependence in which the very integrity of each is compromised by the proximity of the other, repression develops in his text the status of

an inevitability, and his meditation anticipates those of the most advanced contemporary readers of Freud and Heidegger, such as Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and others. Concentrating his attention upon the coincidence of homogeneity and heterogeneity in certain persons and objects, Bataille says of the fascist leader that, while he symbolizes and demands the "devoir, discipline et ordre accomplis" of homogeneity, he is also a heterogeneous entity, to the extent that he is an incarnation of violence and an "objet transcendant de l'affectivité collective" (I, p. 363). Similarly, the "God of the theologians"--the God of the modern capitalist society--is given as representing an affective moral imperative brought, through an "introjection" of the structure of homogeneity, to incarnate the values of utility (I, p. 361). Speaking of the fascist army, whose status among the civilian population is similar to that of the leader, Bataille writes:

Le mode de l'hétérogénéité subit explicitement une altération profonde, achevant de réaliser l'homogénéité intense sans que l'hétérogénéité fondamentale décroisse. (I, p. 359, my emphasis)

This sentence, in the context of the overall movement of Bataille's text, may be understood as an ultimate definition of homogeneity, and this for two reasons. In the first place, the entire homogeneous world is constituted by objects whose "possible" heterogeneity has been partially, but not completely, excluded from consciousness. The priority of heterogeneity is thus a condition for the very homogeneity of these objects. Homogeneity, in this sense, is heterogeneity altérée: heterogeneity contaminated, or partially reduced. The homogeneous reduction of objective reality proceeds from the more fundamental "non-assimilability" of that reality, as it is affectively envisaged by subjectivity. In the

second place, that "reaction against affect" which we saw to be the constitution of homogeneity, is itself an affective reaction. Thus, affect opposes affect, violence outlaws violence, and the homogeneous vision becomes an intense vision.

Complementary to the concept of a homogeneity rendered intense by the priority of that which it reduces, is the concept of a heterogeneity whose accessibility to consciousness has the form of an inevitable reduction. Since the study of heterogeneity must begin with homogeneity, defined as that which can be known by the "science" of the society of utility, and since all that is known by "science" is necessarily known in the form of a reduction, the cognitive relation of a subject to heterogeneity must be a contamination of heterogeneity. Cognition is defined as an intentionality which represses affect. Affect is defined as a relation to reality which founds heterogeneity. But cognition itself is defined as affect. Thus, with the conception of the dream, the unconscious, and the mystical vision, which are held to be immediate apprehensions of heterogeneity (and it should be noted that these options, suggested by Bataille at this early stage of his career, will be discarded later), there can be no intentional proximity to heterogeneity which will not be contaminated by homogeneity, and vice versa. The reductiveness of "science," considered as a negative term, and the unassimilability of affect, considered as a positive term, are both subsumed by the complementary concepts of intensity and contamination, considered as governing conditions for the functioning of intentionality.

"La Structure psychologique du fascisme" is the first Bataillian text in which the characteristic structure of Bataille's dialectic may

be perceived. This dialectic consists of two terms which oppose each other violently, and simultaneously condition each other so intimately as to compromise the univocity of their opposition. No synthesis of the terms is possible. The ontological context of their compressed proximity is the stage for a violence which subsumes and exceeds the univocal "violence" of the "positive" term--here, the term "heterogeneity." Within the context of subjectivity, the dialectic describes a subject who imposes a mediation upon his intentional proximity to objective reality, through his "reaction against affect." This reaction, itself defined as affect, is not effective as an evacuation of violence from perception; but it is effective as a mediating obstacle to the knowledge of that which is "humain jusqu'au déchirement." At the same time, however, the cognition which is defined as a mediation retains a quantity of the "charge" of heterogeneity, in the form of its peculiar "intensity." The proposition that "science cannot know heterogeneity as such" is radically conditioned by the fact of this "intensity."

Although the dialectic is structured with extreme sophistication by Bataille, its context of perception or intentionality is insufficiently grounded. Why, for instance, are some objects more provocative of affect than others? Why is there a coincidence of the pure and the impure in the world of heterogeneity? Why is utility the relation which governs the context of the "reaction against affect?" These questions all concern the motivation which creates the specificity of subjective intentionality in Bataille's text. The intentional act is shown by him to be other than purely mechanical receptivity. That act is always

affectively motivated, according to the still-ambiguous index "humain." The study of this term, and the attempt to ground it ontologically, will occupy Bataille for the rest of his life, and will determine his sacrifice of the system "homogeneity/heterogeneity" in favor of another: the system "continuity/discontinuity."

A Homogeneous Element

Consequent to the problem of a ground for statements about subjectivity is a change in Bataille's thinking, which extends over a decade or more. One fleeting example of the displacements caused by this development may be perceived in the pages of L'Expérience intérieure (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).² In a section significantly entitled "LA COMMUNICATION," the terms "homogeneity" and "heterogeneity" reappear with entirely new meanings:

D'une particule simple à l'autre, il n'y a pas de différence de nature, il n'y a pas non plus de différence entre celle-ci et celle-là. Il y a de ceci qui se produit ici ou là, chaque fois sous forme d'unité, mais cette unité ne persévère pas en elle-même. Des ondes, des vagues, des particules simples ne sont peut-être que les multiples mouvements d'un élément homogène; elles ne possèdent que l'unité fuyante et ne brisent pas l'homogénéité de l'ensemble.

Les groupes composés de nombreuses particules simples possèdent seuls ce caractère hétérogène qui me différencie de toi et isole nos différences dans le reste de l'univers. Ce qu'on appelle un "être" n'est jamais simple, et s'il a seul l'unité durable, il ne la possède qu'imparfaite: elle est travaillée par sa profonde division intérieure, elle demeure mal fermée et, en certains points, attaquable du dehors. (V, pp. 110-11)

Although the context of these two paragraphs, like that of all the fragments which make up the Somme athéologique, resists precise definition, the reader may clearly perceive two basic aspects of Bataille's

perspective. In the first place, the individual subject is being envisaged ontologically. The "unity" of a "being"--the intentional subject included--is here being directly grounded and described. In the second place, the terms "homogeneity" and "heterogeneity," in this perspective, have changed places with each other hierarchically. In his earlier system, Bataille had described what he saw as a reductive vision of objects which repressed a certain non-assimilability inherent in them. This was the "homogeneous" vision. Now Bataille is suggesting that, beyond the "unity" or particularity of any "being," there is a "homogeneous" element, of which this being is merely a fleeting movement. A living individual, in this context, is constituted by a group of such particles--an uncertain closure which gives the illusion of a differentiated whole. But the closure--the illusory "heterogeneity" of this whole--is "mal fermée." The isolation of the individual is open to penetration from the outside.

Analogically, the homogeneous "element" which transcends the particularity of the individual corresponds, by virtue of its very transcendence, to the non-assimilation of the earlier "heterogeneity." Conversely, the "caractère hétérogène" of the integral, differentiated individuals, in the new context, corresponds to the "homogeneous" unity of the partially reduced object, in the older context. Roughly speaking, the category of integral unity as illusion or reduction has been re-named "heterogeneity" instead of "homogeneity," and the category of transcendent non-assimilability (that which escapes the unifying reduction) has been re-named "homogeneity" instead of "heterogeneity."

From the context of the reductive closure of subjective intentionality, with its affective motivations and its solidarity with the

category of utility, Bataille has displaced his terms. They now refer directly to the being of the subject. This being is described as an illusory integrity whose closure is in reality not complete, or whose "unity" is "imperfect." Bataille's critical gesture, which had previously operated in an un-grounded perceptual or intentional context, now repeats itself in a most basic context. It posits a continuous element which transcends a moment of its own movement. The category "imperfect closure," which had previously described the object of a reductive intentionality, has now reappeared as a possible ground for an entire theory of the being of "humanity" in its totality. This theory, whose essential structures may be perceived throughout the three volumes of the Somme athéologique, becomes explicit in the complementary essays entitled La Part maudite (1949) and L'Erotisme (1957).

The Concept of Discontinuity

The notion of imperfect closure, characterized as "heterogeneity" in the quotation above, is a major Bataillan concern through the 1940s. It is opposed, momentarily, to the term "continuum," in Méthode de méditation (V, p. 195), and it forms the background for the elaboration of dépense in La Part maudite. With L'Erotisme, the dialectic "continuity/discontinuity" is developed for the elaboration of this central concept. In this essay, Bataille's characteristic multiplicity of vocabularies will include that of biology. "Discontinuity" will initially be a biological description of the individuality, unit, particularity, or integrity of a living being:

La reproduction met en jeu des êtres discontinus.

Les êtres qui se reproduisent sont distincts les uns des autres et les êtres reproduits sont distincts entre eux comme ils sont distincts de ceux dont ils sont issus. Chaque être est distinct de tous les autres. Sa naissance, sa mort et les événements de sa vie peuvent avoir pour les autres un intérêt, mais il est seul intéressé directement. Lui seul naît. Lui seul meurt. Entre un être et un autre, il y a un abîme, il y a une discontinuité.

Cet abîme se situe, par exemple, entre vous qui m'écoutez et moi qui vous parle. Nous essayons de communiquer, mais nulle communication entre nous ne pourra supprimer une différence première. Si vous mourez, ce n'est pas moi qui meurs. Nous sommes, vous et moi, des êtres discontinus. (E., p. 17)

Thus discontinuity as a category stands for the logical domain of identity to self, or ipseity. Or more specifically, within the biologically oriented context of Bataille's demonstration, it stands for a characteristic of that domain which, while not exhaustive, is held to be irreducible. Ipseity, whatever its predicates and possibilities may be (including, as Bataille writes, a form of communication), has a character of isolation or separateness. Whatever the individual subject may be--ipse, animal rationale, the unity of an experience, ego, or even être-pour-soi--he or she is also "discontinuity."

If a discontinuous creature depends for its existence and sustenance upon the "fact of life" or "energy of life," then it may be said that this basic energy transcends the particularity of the individual. In other words, "living being" as an economy of energy has a certain priority over the fact that this being is invariably incarnated in the form of individuals. For Bataille, the "fact of life" is a continuity of living being. This continuity passes through the individual creature during its life span, and is in turn passed on to other living beings through death and reproduction. This "fact of life" as a continuity transcending ipseity may actually be perceived at certain

moments. One such moment is the moment of conception. Two gametes fuse to form an egg; or a one-celled individual splits to form two new individuals. At these moments discontinuity--particularly--becomes, for an instant, continuous. There is a passage from discontinuity, to continuity (and then to discontinuity again) at the conception of each new discontinuous being.

Le spermatozoïde et l'ovule sont à l'état élémentaire des êtres discontinus, mais ils s'unissent, en conséquence une continuité s'établit entre eux pour former un nouvel être, à partir de la mort, de la disparition des êtres séparés. Le nouvel être est lui-même discontinu, mais il porte en lui le passage à la continuité, la fusion, mortelle pour chacun d'eux, des deux êtres distincts. (E., p. 19)

Similarly, the splitting of a one-celled individual involves "un instant de continuité. Le premier meurt, mais il apparaît dans sa mort un instant fondamental de continuité de deux êtres" (E., p. 18). Conception, then, is a momentary passage from discontinuity to continuity, a passage which returns to discontinuity in the form of a new being. The new creature is founded by the disappearance of the gametes, or the disappearance of the one-celled progenitor, or, in the case of sexual reproduction, the implied eventual death of the parents. Death is therefore immediately associated with the moment of continuity, or with the idea of continuity as life transcending particularity.

The physical fact of death has the same economic status as the moment of conception. When an individual ceases to live, the energy which animated it passes, in a moment of continuity, to another or several other discontinuous beings. This biological exchange sustains life, and is in a sense the "fact of life" which passes among particular beings.

Between these moments of conception and death, living beings are incarnated as discontinuous. Their being is separation, isolation, identity to self. The only incarnation of continuity is discontinuity. Against this background, there is a fundamental necessity felt by the discontinuous being to prolong its existence as discontinuity. The need to live is the need to remain separate, since death is the destruction of separation. But for the general economy of life on earth, there is no category of "necessity." The "fact of life" is a continual economy of destructions or "dilapidations" of living creatures. Its transcendence of discontinuity is described in La Part maudite as a basic excess of energy:

A la surface du globe, pour la matière vivante en général, l'énergie est toujours en excès, la question est toujours posée en termes de luxe, le choix est limité au mode de dilapidation des richesses. C'est à l'être vivant particulier, ou aux ensembles limités d'êtres vivants, que le problème de la nécessité se pose. (P.M., p. 62, my emphasis)

The movement of energy in the general economy is a play of destructions: birth, growth through consumption of life, and death. "Necessity" has no logical place in this general economy of exchange. But from the point of view of the living individual, necessity is the condition of life itself. In this context, we can see that the problem of utility as an essential relation in the subject's intentionality has not ceased to concern Bataille, since "La Structure psychologique du fascisme." He is here grounding that relation through his description of survival as the primary necessity confronting the living individual. In subsequent demonstrations, Bataille will situate utility against the background of survival. The raison d'être of an intentionality based on utility

will be survival. And the derivation of the concept of survival as a necessity which influences intentionality is, as we have seen, the concept "discontinuity."

We may note, in the context of survival, another example of a characteristic Bataillian critical "gesture": the gesture by which a term is made to condition the term opposed to it. Such a condition operates in the case of survival. For the struggle to survive, as a necessity, is a comportment relative to continuity, considered as the fact or eventuality of death. Survival envisages death. This relation which characterizes all life implies a certain awareness of death on a pre-conscious level. Prior to the complexities of a subject's intentionality, Bataille sees a primary comportment which is already "intentional" and which will condition any configuration of consciousness. In addition to this, survival also functions as an example of the dependence of discontinuity upon continuity, a dependence analogous to that of homogeneity upon heterogeneity. Discontinuity, even if considered as closed and integral, comports itself in opposition to continuity which transcends it. The closure of discontinuity, therefore, is already defined in terms of a "tension" analogous to that of homogeneity. Just as homogeneity was a difficult, partial containment of heterogeneity--an incomplete reduction--discontinuity is an isolated state conditioned by continuity, even in its opposition to the latter.

But this condition in the form of opposition is not the only one. A study of the total system represented by La Part maudite and L'Erotisme reveals an extraordinary dialectical tension between continuity and discontinuity, and a structure of mutual conditioning

which leaves each term radically dependent upon the other. One example of this structure is a second, more radical formulation of the concept of excess as a relation of continuity to discontinuity. This formulation is the primary logical principle of La Part maudite. In Bataille's terms, the metaphorical model for the "energy of life" which animates all discontinuous creatures is the energy of the sun. This energy is always in excess with relation to the necessarily limited capacity of containment represented by discontinuous life forms. Thus, "l'organisme vivant, dans la situation que déterminent les jeux de l'énergie à la surface du globe, reçoit en principe plus d'énergie qu'il n'est nécessaire au maintien de la vie" (P.M., p. 60). The concept that the organism "contains too much energy" is the basis upon which Bataille will build a series of empirical consequences, the most important of which will be dépense. But before we consider these consequences, it is necessary to take note of a decisive paradox which is already established by Bataille's basic definitions.

The struggle to survive envisages death by opposition to it. This struggle is essentially a struggle of conservation. It is opposed to a general economy of excess, an economy which continually exceeds the particularity of the discontinuous being, through death. But the struggle to survive is animated--provided with its own energy--precisely by that energy of continuity which the struggle is intended to oppose:

Mais l'homme n'est pas seulement l'être séparé qui dispute sa part de ressources au monde vivant ou aux autres hommes. Le mouvement général d'exsudation (de dilapidation) de la matière vivante l'anime, et il ne saurait l'arrêter. . . .
(P.M., p. 62)

It is important to read this quotation rigorously in order to avoid a misunderstanding of the precise relation of discontinuity to continuity. The opposition of these terms does not exhaust their relation. Bataille will describe two basic, opposite tendencies in the discontinuous being: a tendency toward self-conservation, and a tendency toward loss of the integrity of self. But prior to these two tendencies, there is a more radical intimacy of the terms of continuity and discontinuity. When Bataille writes that the general movement of energy animates man, it must be understood that it animates him in all his comportments. It animates specifically his desire for self-preservation. Death threatens the discontinuous being "from the outside," but the desire to live takes its urgency from the same continuous energy whose violent play constitutes the general destruction of all individual beings. The many analogues of self-preservation which structure Bataille's system in its totality such as prohibition, knowledge, the profane world, the prosaic world, et cetera, will all be conditioned by the fact that continuity is the animating energy of the comportment of self-preservation. Concomitantly, the opposed comportments, which tend toward loss of self, such as transgression, eroticism, sovereignty, dépense, etc., will be radically conditioned by the fact that life is defined as discontinuity. This mutual conditioning will have a decisive priority at all the key moments of Bataille's demonstrations. The overall context "communication" in particular will follow a pattern which takes its force from this priority.

We saw above that homogeneity was defined as "heterogeneity-reduced," and that the primary, violent term of heterogeneity was of

less concern to Bataille than the human experience of "violence-limited." The same structural configuration operates in the case of discontinuity. Death, for the discontinuous being is a final, instantaneous contact with continuity. It is an utter loss of the limit of ipseity: an end to isolation. It is the moment of unmediated communication par excellence. But it is not the moment which ultimately concerns Bataille. His system, which begins by envisaging the general economy of life and death in terms of continuity, concentrates its energy and develops its force by concerning itself with the point of view of the discontinuous being, that is to say, with life. Life is discontinuity. It is violence (the non-assimilable: excess) experienced within limits. It is what Maurice Blanchot writing on Bataille (in La Nouvelle Revue Française, No. 118, August 1962) has aptly called "L'Expérience-limite." Life is the experience of the ineluctability of ipseity, as separation.

But the system "continuity/discontinuity" demonstrates that ipseity, like homogeneity, is intense and paradoxical. Death is a passage of discontinuity to continuity. But discontinuity itself is a constant, intimate contact with continuity in the form of a tenuous, diachronically circumscribed enclosure of continuity. This contact is paradoxical because discontinuity opposes the violence of continuity in the struggle for survival, but at the same time incarnates and expresses that violence through its very desire to survive. Continuity is excess. Survival is a paradoxical mobilization of excess in the direction of self-conservation. The comportment which seeks to maintain isolation is itself excessive. Self-protection is solidary with destruction in

spite of its ostensible opposition to destruction. Non-violence, conceived as the effort to avoid death, is itself violent. Thus, the critical movement which established the violence of the homogeneous "reaction against affect" is reproduced in the later system. But now the context of this movement is much more basic, and it will provide, as we shall see, an ontological background for the comportments which most interest Bataille. This background, structurally homologous with the "reaction against affect" itself defined as affect, may be termed dis-continuity. It represents an ontological coincidence of two opposing tendencies, or the coincidence of two modes of being which invade each other as absolute conditions. As a category, it will have a priority over all other categories in Bataille's system. In all his major demonstrations, Bataille will return to the structure of mutual conditioning even if the return is momentary and apparently marginal. The structural dualities which characterize Bataille's discourse will always be subsumed by a term of "violence-limited" which takes precedence over an initial term of "violence," such as "heterogeneity" or "continuity."

Dépense and the "Mise en Jeu"

The notion of dépense, retained from Bataille's earlier system, is in the context of excess the principal concept of La Part maudite. We have seen that the priority of excess over conservation is the inherence of continuity in discontinuity. Self-conservation is violent. In addition to this primary dilemma, however, there is a movement of discontinuity toward greater violence. This movement approaches the

extremity, or the limit, of the uneasy containment which is discontinuity. In the form of a "nostalgia for lost continuity" or an "obsession with a primary continuity" (E., p. 20), it will have an essential place in the subjective context of transgression. In its first elaboration, the concept "dépense" functions in a physical context, without reference to consciousness.

Dépense ("expense," "loss") is invoked by Bataille as a fundamental consequence of the excess of vital energy with relation to the limited nature of its incarnation. This concept is introduced in two ways. In the first place, the multiplication of living beings at the surface of the earth requires a limit since their expansion in space causes an economic "pressure." The economy of this limit is death. "L'inégalité de la pression dans la matière vivante ouvre constamment à la croissance la place laissée par la mort" (P.M., p. 73). Death is an economic fact for life in a limited space. But from the point of view of the discontinuous being, death is also a violent loss of energy. As opposed to the self-conserving expenses of energy which form an individual's activity in life, this final loss does not contribute to the individual's growth or integrity. It is without "profit" to him. "Perte sans profit" is the definition of dépense. Death is the instance of "pure" dépense because, as the destruction of discontinuity, it is a loss which is absolutely non-recuperable.

In the second place, as we have seen, each living being contains within its limits more energy than is necessary for its continued existence. The organism "reçoit en principe plus d'énergie qu'il n'est nécessaire au maintien de la vie" (P.M., p. 60). The first

result of this excess of energy is the physical growth of the individual. However, "si le système ne peut plus croître, ou si l'excédent ne peut en entier être absorbé dans sa croissance, il faut nécessairement le perdre sans profit, le dépenser . . ." (P.M., p. 60). The reader will note here that dépense, which in 1933 was a comportment invoked but not explained by Bataille, is now given a context and a raison d'être, in the form of the general economy and the notion of excess. Here, as in the case of discontinuity, an ontological perspective is developed through an empirical terminology as a ground for the study of specific comportments. The primary instance of dépense in this second formulation is sexual reproduction, which, like death, is simultaneously a necessity for the conservation of life in general, and a violent loss of energy for the individual. This loss is, firstly, a physical paroxysm disproportionate to its reproductive end:

C'est pour l'animal l'occasion d'une soudaine et frénétique dilapidation des ressources d'énergie, portée en un moment à l'extrême du possible. . . . Cette dilapidation va bien au-delà de ce qui suffirait à la croissance de l'espèce.
(P.M., p. 76)

and, secondly, a loss which has an intimate affinity with death by virtue of its status as a giving of life by a mortal being:

Dès l'abord, la sexualité diffère de la croissance avare. Si, envisagée quant à l'espèce, elle apparaît comme une croissance, elle n'en est pas moins le luxe des individus. Ce caractère est plus accusé dans la reproduction sexuée, où les individus engendrés sont clairement séparés de ceux qui les engendrent--et leur donnent la vie comme on donne aux autres. (P.M., pp. 75-6)

Thus, on the level of the individual, the mathematics of reproduction become violent paroxysm, loss of energy, and "luxe" (excessive sumptuousity, prodigality). For the individual, reproduction radically exceeds

its conservative end. Here we have another example of the general economy which takes leave of its own generality to concentrate its attention upon the individual and his "point of view."

This movement from the general to the particular is also a fundamental movement from the context of death to that of life. Discontinuity is the incarnation of continuity prior to the moment of death. Death is the "pure" form of dépense: an absolute loss of energy. But the forms of dépense experienced by a living creature are fundamentally different from death in that they do not constitute a destruction of the limit that is discontinuity. They are limited forms of dépense. Dépense is, therefore, firstly, an inevitability for the discontinuous being (in the form of death); secondly, an eventuality or possibility against which the struggle for survival is directed; and thirdly, a constant inner orientation or possibility of discontinuity, considered as a limit which contains too much energy. This last formula is reminiscent of heterogeneity, which was, in the earlier system, a constant affective possibility for an otherwise reductive intentionality.

The moment of sexuality is a privileged movement of the "tendency" of dépense to its extreme. It is a movement of violence (discontinuity as containment of continuity) to its limit. The phrase "à l'extrême du possible" clearly delineates the particular violence of the moment. The moment of dépense--in life--in no way alters or destroys the essential nature of discontinuity. This condition operates specifically for the human experience of eroticism, which is not a "sortie hors des limites": "Mais dans l'érotisme, moins encore que dans la reproduction,

la vie discontinue n'est pas condamnée . . . à disparaître: elle est seulement mise en question" (E., p. 23). The erotic moment of dépense, defined as the sexual paroxysm of animality, experienced by the conscious and self-conscious human subject, is a moment at which discontinuity is "placed in question" or "mise en jeu." At this moment, discontinuity is brought into an intense proximity with its opposite, the fact of its life and death: continuity. An individual's particularity is brought into contact with all that transcends particularity. Here the limit of discontinuity is "mise en jeu." But the limit is not destroyed. There is no liberation of the individual from its constraint, short of death. Eroticism is the experience of the limit at the extremity of the possible: the experience of violence at its limit.

We have seen that discontinuity, as an incarnation of continuity, is a paradoxical containment. The struggle for survival is also a paradoxical moment. Dépense, considered in the context of these other formulations, is not a new "kind" of violence. It is a movement of the basic violence of dis-continuity (i.e., the violence of "violence-contained" or "violence-limited") to its own limit, in a moment of great intensity. It is a movement from violence to greater violence within a consistent logical context. The discontinuous being cannot take leave of its limits. Its only possibility is discontinuity as the isolation of ipseity. It is clear that "communication," which will be the overall context of Bataille's descriptions of living beings, cannot be defined as communion, and that there is no "mystical" dimension to Bataille's system. Effective escape from the isolation of discontinuity, short of death, is an impossibility. However, the discontinuous being

is animated by continuity, contains continuity, and has a constant experience of continuity in the ontological dilemma which is survival. Bataille calls this overall experience the impossible, and, by extension, he calls humanity itself the impossible: "la sauvage impossibilité que je suis, qui ne peut éviter ses limites, et ne peut non plus s'y tenir" (C., p. 261). To be a living individual is to feel one's limits (one's integrity, one's ipseity) incessantly endangered by the energy they contain--an energy closely associated, logically and even pre-consciously, with death (the destruction of limits). But the limits in life are indestructible. To be alive is therefore to experience a continual, impossible destruction of limits. This impossible but incessant destruction is dis-continuity as mise en jeu. Its extreme form is dépense.

Communication: The Law of Isolation and Loss

Les contenus se perdant les uns dans les autres des diverses formes de dépense (rire, héroïsme, extase, sacrifice, poésie, érotisme ou autres) définissaient d'eux-mêmes une loi de communication réglant les jeux de l'isolement et de la perte des êtres. (E.I., p. 11)

The économie générale, as a theory of discontinuous identities and the exchange which constitutes their economy, is for Bataille a law of communication. The concept "communication" refers, on a primary level, to (1) the highly problematized idea of identity to self as isolation, and (2) the relation of this idea to the equally problematized concept of loss. The paradigm toward which Bataille's discussions of communication will tend is the unmediated communication of death. Death is an end to isolation, a triumph over alterity. But since it abolishes the

subject of communication, death will not have a central function among Bataille's concepts. It will be a logical presence at the margins of his system, and, in a sense, the formulas of the theory of communication will have a constant reference to it. "Communication unto death" will be the actual subject of the system. In the absence of death as resolution, communication will be the theory of discontinuity's particular violence: the violence of "violence-limited."

The discontinuous being contains the energy of continuity according to the model of "tension," or uncertain containment described above. At the moment of death this being loses its content of energy and becomes part of the general economy of life and death, isolation and loss. This economy, as we have seen, is a basic system of communications or exchanges which involve the loss of identity. Before death, however, a multi-cellular discontinuous being contains within itself the violent play of destructions of the general economy, since its own cells are continually being born and dying:

Ce que tu es tient à l'activité qui lie les éléments sans nombre qui te composent, à l'intense communication de ces éléments entre eux. Ce sont des contagions d'énergie, de mouvement, de chaleur ou des transferts d'éléments, qui constituent intérieurement la vie de ton être organique.
(E.I., p. 111)

On a purely biological level, then, the discontinuous being is constituted by communication. In this sense, Bataille can already say that "La communication est un fait qui ne se surajoute nullement à la réalité humaine, mais la constitue" (E.I., p. 37).

Communication as the constitution of discontinuity is another condition of the paradox of the isolated being. We have already seen that continuity makes possible the life of the discontinuous being, and

therefore paradoxically conditions the limit which is opposed to it. At the same time, communication constitutes discontinuity. The very limit which forbids (until death) the communication of discontinuity with continuity is already constituted by that communication. In addition, the economic life of the discontinuous individual who eats, grows, de-composes, and re-builds himself is a constant process of exchange with other beings in his environment: a play of isolation and dépense as death. Against this background, the very limit "identity to self" has the status of an illusion:

Seule l'instabilité des liaisons (ce fait banal: quelque intime que soit un lien, la séparation est aisée, se multiplie et peut se prolonger) permet l'illusion de l'être isolé, replié sur lui-même et possédant le pouvoir d'exister sans échange.
(E.I., p. 100)

Communication, considered as a system of absolute and essential "links" among beings which constitute a continuity of exchange, transcends the "illusory" integrity of these beings. But from the "point of view" of an individual, ipseity precedes such communication absolutely. In other words, autonomy precedes composition. "Ces deux principes--compositions transcendant les composantes, autonomie relative des composantes--règlent l'existence de chaque être" (E.I., p. 100). The two parts of this formula may be interpreted in two separate ways, according to the logic of discontinuity: (1) From the point of view of the inner communication which constitutes discontinuity, composition (the whole, isolated discontinuous being) transcends its parts (biological entities in a constant process of exchange and autonomy, isolation and destruction, life and death). (2) From the point of view of outward communication, the part (the isolated discontinuous individual) has a relative

but crucial autonomy compared to the play of exchanges which makes up its biological life.

This paradoxical condition has the form of the glissement, a concept which will be central to Bataille's theories of knowledge and intersubjectivity. At the biological level, "où tu voudras saisir ta substance intemporelle, tu ne rencontres qu'un glissement, que les jeux mal coordonnés de tes éléments périssables" (E.I., p. 111). The experience, as well as the concept of discontinuity, is a glissement, a slipping or sliding between two states, continuity and discontinuity, which condition each other both logically and existentially.

The priority of continuity and communication as foundations of the "illusion" of discontinuity does not constitute a resolution of the dilemma of discontinuity. The "relative autonomy" of the discontinuous being as separation or isolation is essential to that being's self-awareness in the struggle for survival. The "illusion" of ipseity is therefore a privileged illusion, constitutive of self-awareness in general. The self, in general, is this illusion. Its privilege will inform all human comportments with regard to intersubjective communication, and will condition all subsequent meanings of the word "communication" in Bataille's texts.

Communication and the Impossible

"Communication" is the domain of the general economy, which envisages limits (isolation) and their destruction (loss and exchange) globally. On this level, communication is a fact, a law of the "fact of life." But the domain of the general economy in Bataille's works,

functions as background for certain ontological statements about subjectivity. These statements form a theory of human communication, considered as an elaboration of the problem of radical isolation and of the possibility of an "opening" within that isolation. The multiple conditions and articulations which are applied to this "possibility" define the architecture of Bataille's system in its totality.

Dis-continuity is continuity within the limit of discontinuity. It is communication within the limit of isolation. This is the twofold paradox of the discontinuous being. Continuity founds this being as discontinuous. Communication founds it as isolated and therefore non-communicative. The only un-mediated outward communication between this being and continuity, or even objective reality, will be death.

Against this background a second formulation of communication appears in Bataille's system. This formulation is inserted into the context described by the key terms "tension" or "intensity," "excess," and the glissement. In this context, all possibility of non-mediated communication as communion or unity or coincidence has been sacrificed, and what remains is a communication based on the paradox of discontinuity. The conditions of this communication must be elaborated according to a concept of humanity as lived paradox. In order for this to be done, the "empirical" framework of Bataille's original formulations about biological life must give way to a much more difficult ontological framework. The terms of this new context, attempting as they do to delimit a paradoxical experience, will in many cases appear to defy any logical discourse based on the principles of identity and non-contradiction. They will be paradoxical terms. Although

Bataille's invocation of such terms is particularly difficult, because of the aphoristic nature of his writings, he is not alone in his recourse to them. Many of the most important contemporary thinkers find it necessary to make similar gestures. One thinks, for example, of the formulas of Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and Gilles Deleuze, in the realm of ontology and communication, or of Maurice Blanchot in literary studies. Deleuze, for instance, is led in a study of Proust, to posit the concept of "distances without intervals" in order to account for the famous Proustian "vases clos"; Levinas, to the concept of a "pre-voluntary" passivity as an ontological condition for the concept of free will; Derrida, to the concepts of the "trace" and "différance" as "pre-originary" conditions for the concept of identity itself; Blanchot, to a concept of "impossibility" similar to that of Bataille.³ Such difficult concepts as these have come to occupy central positions in the texts of contemporary philosophy.

In Bataille's case, the study of dis-continuity leads to a situation in which communication requires an "opening" on the part of the isolated being. And there is such an opening, but such is the paradox of discontinuity that this opening can only be defined according to the model of closure. Specifically, the opening will be defined as the insufficiency inherent in a complete, ineluctable closure. Bataille will say, for instance, that "nous sommes des êtres discontinus, individus mourant isolément dans une aventure inintelligible"; and then he will add that "nous supportons mal la situation qui nous rive à l'individualité de hasard, à l'individualité périssable que nous sommes" (E., p. 20). There is a sense, as we have seen, in which the

ineluctable limit of individuality is intense--a sense in which the limit trembles. This tension is implied in another Bataillian definition of dis-continuity:

Ce n'est pas en tant que chose définie que l'homme
se heurte à la nature. . . .

C'est comme effort d'autonomie. (C., p. 376)

In the empirical context of survival, we have already seen this "effort d'autonomie." Survival is a state in which limits are intensely defended. But at the same time, the "effort d'autonomie" has the status of an uneasy supporting of limits by a being whose inner energy (continuity) tends toward the destruction of those limits. The "effort d'autonomie" is ultimately a description of the total paradox of discontinuity. The limit is defended, but the limit itself is constituted by intense communication in the form of continual destruction. The limit which attempts to fortify itself is itself continuity: that which ultimately destroys all limits. Violence opposes violence in an effort at autonomy which is the specific experience of human violence. The limit of discontinuity, unto death, is indestructible. And yet, in a sense, it is incomplete. It is vulnerable. It is inachevée.

Dans la mesure où les êtres semblent parfaits, ils demeurent isolés, refermés sur eux-mêmes. Mais la blessure de l'inachèvement les ouvre. Par ce qu'on peut nommer inachèvement, animale nudité, blessure, les divers êtres séparés communiquent, prennent vie en se perdant dans la communication de l'un à l'autre. (C., p. 263, my emphasis)

This paragraph, taken from the most difficult semantic zone of Bataille's system, describes a triple confrontation of opposites. It describes what one might call a conciliation of terms, based on the model of non-toleration. Discontinuity is an inachèvement conceived as, or conditioned by, achèvement. It is an integrity of surface whose

logical condition is "nudity." It is a "wound" conditioned by imperviousness.

These conciliations, in common logical terms, are impossibilities. Yet, against the background established by the structure of discontinuity, they are necessary conciliations. The limit of discontinuity is a tenuous limit, even in its solidity. The limit is constituted by violent communication. In a sense, it is constituted by the play of continuity. This very continuity inclines the isolated creature toward dépense, and ultimately toward the final dépense of death. Still, from the point of view of the individual himself, the fact of individuality is felt as an opposition to violence, which itself is felt as exterior. This "feeling," this "self-awareness," in the struggle for survival, commands the life of the discontinuous being, until death.

The intensity of limits which contain more than they can contain is inachèvement. Continuity, incarnated for a violent moment as discontinuity, is inachèvement. But it is inachèvement as the impossible: "la sauvage impossibilité que je suis, qui ne peut éviter ses limites, et ne peut non plus s'y tenir" (C., p. 261). Thus, for Bataille, the im-possible is an authentic logical condition, an articulating principle. It is "possible" to conceive achèvement as inachèvement, or a closure as a wound, or an integral surface as nudity. These conceptions are possible according to the condition that they are im-possible. The concept of nudity, in particular, draws our attention to the idea of the impossible, through its common usage. How is it possible to ascribe primary vulnerability to an integral surface? It is not "possible," but the everyday concept of

nudity implies such an attribution, which would be a necessary recourse for the description of a human surface. Emmanuel Levinas has mobilized this common implication of the word "nudity" in order to describe subjectivity as "a nudity before it is a surface which would receive an impression."⁴ Bataille will specifically equate communication with nudity--"la nudité, la communication" (E.I., p. 66)--in an aphoristic context. In any case, such basic distinctions or conditions as we see in Bataille's paragraph are only possible in the context of humanity, or subjectivity, or communication, as paradoxes which are not thought, but actually lived. Maurice Blanchot, addressing himself to the concepts of inachèvement and the impossible in Bataille's thought, correctly describes a logical recourse which Jacques Derrida has called "nécessaire et impossible":

Quel est l'excès qui fait que l'achèvement serait encore et toujours inachevé? D'où vient ce mouvement d'excéder dont la mesure n'est pas donnée par le pouvoir qui peut tout? Quelle est cette "possibilité" qui s'offrirait après la réalisation de toutes les possibilités comme le moment capable de les renverser ou de les retirer silencieusement? A ces questions, lorsque Georges Bataille répond en parlant de l'impossible--l'un des derniers mots qu'il ait rendus publics--, il faut l'entendre rigoureusement; il faut entendre que la possibilité n'est pas la seule dimension de notre existence et qu'il nous est peut-être donné de vivre chaque événement de nous-mêmes dans un double rapport, une fois comme ce que nous comprenons, saisissons, supportons et maîtrisons (fût-ce difficilement et douloureusement) en le rapportant à quelque bien, quelque valeur, c'est-à-dire en dernier terme à l'Unité, une autre fois comme ce qui échappe à notre pouvoir même d'en faire l'épreuve, mais à l'épreuve duquel nous ne saurions échapper: oui, comme si l'impossibilité, cela en quoi nous ne pouvons plus pouvoir, nous attendait derrière tout ce que nous vivons, pensons et disons. . . . ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 585)

Blanchot correctly situates the impossible as part of a "double rapport" which regulates the ontology of dis-continuity. When he describes the

im-possible as that which awaits the subject behind the univocity of the possible, he suggests that the prefix "im-" has the status of a condition. For dis-continuity, the im-possible is that tension of non-conciliation or non-toleration which surrounds and conditions the achèvement of the possible. Inachèvement conditions achèvement, as heterogeneity conditioned homogeneity; as continuity conditions dis-continuity; as communication conditions isolation; as excess conditions containment; as violence conditions integrity.

The limit of discontinuity is an excess which contains excess. It is a communication preventing communication. It is the impossible containment of that which cannot be contained: continuity. The incarnation of continuity is itself the impossible. Survival is what Maurice Blanchot has called "le devenir sans fin d'une mort impossible à mourir" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 588). Dis-continuity is an incessant "mouvement d'excéder" within an indestructible limit. It is a movement without resolution, but nevertheless a movement "à l'épreuve duquel nous ne saurions échapper." In the Bataille quotation above, the expression "prennent vie en se perdant dans la communication" mimes this continual movement through its present participle. Dis-continuity is that which "comes to life losing itself" in the "endless becoming of a death impossible to die." This movement toward the limit, this excessive movement of violence at the limit, this perpetual extremity, is communication.

The general problem of intentionality and knowledge leads, in Bataille's thought, to the overall problem of subjectivity. This larger problem is elaborated by Bataille within the context of "communication,"

considered as a posing of the question: "How is communication possible among separate, isolated beings?" Bataille's manipulation of empirical contexts leads him to an ontological answer to this question. He describes the category "communication" as, firstly, an exigency, defined as the containment within limits of too much energy, and the ubiquity of dépense as the extreme form of a "mouvement d'excéder"; and, secondly--as exigency, an impossibility. Communication is a movement which is other than "possible" ("falling or lying within the powers of an agent or activity"); and other than "impossible" ("incapable of being or occurring"). Communication is the experience and the concept of a continual, imminent, inescapable, but im-possible destruction of limits: a destruction whose violence is the result of an absence of resolution.

The development of a dialectic whose specificity is its sacrifice of a term of synthesis or resolution is the Bataillian gesture which structures the system of "La Notion de dépense" and "La Structure psychologique du fascisme." The early contextual incarnation of this gesture is a problematization of the statement that "science cannot know heterogeneity as such," in the direction of the assertion that homogeneity is an intense vision. The displacement of this gesture which appears in the system "continuity/discontinuity" is problematization of the concept "discontinuity," whose principal axis is an ontological structure described by the terms "tension," "excess," "dépense," "mise en jeu," "glissement," "effort d'autonomie," "in-achèvement," "impossible." Within Bataille's system, many other terms will be derived, around this axis, for the elaboration of his questions:

"sacré," "expérience intérieure," "transgression," "souveraineté," "non-savoir," etc. No such term will function without a conditioning relation to that zone of non-synthesis represented by the early "humain jusqu'au déchirement," the later "intensity," and the impossible. In no case will a term whose predicate is "violence" be free from the conditioning proximity of a central term whose predicate is "violence-limited." The unicity of the "possible" will always be the stage for a Bataillian sacrifice whose momentum and trajectory will lead to the domain of the im-possible. This domain, and with it Bataille's system in its totality, will be given the name "la communication."

Notes

¹References to this essay, as well as to "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" and to "La Notion de dépense," will follow the pagination of Volume I of Bataille's Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

²References to this book will follow the pagination of Volume V of the Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), as will references to Le Coupable (originally published in 1944). The following abbreviations will be used: E.I. (L'Expérience intérieure); C. (Le Coupable); E. (L'Erotisme: 10/18, 1970); P.M. (La Part maudite: Minuit "Points," 1967).

³See especially J. Derrida, De la grammatologie (Paris: Minuit, 1967); G. Deleuze, Proust et les signes (Paris: P.U.F., 1972), Logique du sens (Paris: Minuit, 1969); E. Levinas, Humanisme de l'autre homme (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1973); M. Blanchot, L'Espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

⁴See "Sans identité" and "Humanisme et an-archie" in Humanisme de l'autre homme.

CHAPTER II

EXCESS, PROHIBITION, AND TRANSGRESSION IN BATAILLE

Excess and the Process of Closure

Bataille's text describes a subjectivity defined as the paradoxical unicity of a problematic closure. The movement of this description, considered from the perspective of its outward forms, is unusually complex. It includes multiple discursive modes, often assembled within the dimensions of a single published communication; a variety of familiar terminologies which are invariably appropriated and redefined; and a proliferation of new, apparently private terms whose definition is internal and substitutive. The more immediate forms of Bataille's discourse, which include aphoristic declarations, statements of value, ironic commentaries, etc., are themselves highly personal and idiosyncratic, by comparison with traditional discursive procedures. The pattern of rejections and recuperations which characterized most readings of Bataille during his lifetime, and which characterizes many present-day interpretations of his thought, may be partially understood as a reaction to the manifest difficulty of his discourse. In addition, however, the tendency of these rejections and recuperations to function within an ideological context may be partially understood as a reaction to the notion of closure itself, in its particular resistance to discursive definition.

The initial predicate of subjectivity in Bataille's text is ineluctable closure. This closure, designated as "isolation," "separation," "particularity," "discontinuity," etc., is an irreducible condition of ipseity for Bataille, and structures an entire zone of his system through such incarnations as "prohibition," "utility," "profane world," "primacy of the future," "knowledge," etc. The introduction of the notion of closure by Bataille occurs in two basic moments. The first of these moments consists of an invocation of closure, accompanied by a negative value judgment, and the concomitant, exuberant declaration of the possibility of a breach within closure. Again, the terms referring to this breach--"inachèvement," "violence," "heterogeneity," "blessure," "perte," etc.--will, through multiple changes in context, resonate through a region of the system. This region will be characterized by such concepts as "transgression," "sacred world," "non-savoir," "communication," etc. Bataille's invocation of closure often has the rhetorical character of a nearly aphoristic declaration, as in the following example: "Dans la mesure où les êtres semblent parfaits, ils demeurent isolés, refermés sur eux-mêmes. Mais la blessure de l'inachèvement les ouvre."¹ In another formulation, the concept of the breach may be described through the application of conditions of possibility, but its context will be no less private or problematic: "La communication ne peut avoir lieu d'un être plein et intact à l'autre: elle veut des êtres ayant l'être en eux-mêmes mis en jeu . . ." (S.N., p. 44). Thus, at the initial moment of the duality "closure/breach," Bataille's discursive gesture has the appearance of an ideological declaration of unfounded "possibility." An approving

interpretation of his thought, at this level, may take the form of an enthusiastic mimicry of his basic expression of exigency, without elaboration or explanation: "In order for communication to take place, there must be a rupture of integrity." A negative appraisal, proceeding from the same moment, may take the form of the question: "Does communication take place, or does it not take place?" The posing of this question, in spite of its frequent function as a dismissal of Bataille's "mysticism" from further consideration, is a pertinent and necessary gesture. A violent confrontation of closure and breach, posited without an elaboration of the conditions of possibility of these terms, may not be coherently understood, but only approved or rejected. Its context is properly ideological.

The second basic movement of the dualism "closure/breach" specifically situates these two concepts within the overall context of what may be called the "problem of possibility" or a "logic of possibility," and thereby problematizes not only the apparent univocity of this duality, but also its logical context. Here, a subtle and progressive definition of the concepts of closure and breach will be undertaken through a manipulation of their opposition. This opposition, conceived initially as non-toleration, will be the object of a series of stipulations, pursued through a variety of terms and contexts. The ultimate effect of these stipulations will be a definition of non-toleration as the paradoxical modality of a structure of mutual conditioning. This paradoxical coincidence of the relations of non-toleration and radical interdependence, in its function as the axis of definition of Bataille's central terms, will be seen to invade the

declarative level of Bataille's statements and to inscribe these statements within the complexity of a textual system. At this level, which informs the intensely private discursivity of texts such as L'Expérience intérieure or Le Coupable as well as the more traditionally expository L'Erotisme or La Part maudite, the conditions of possibility of closure and breach will be clearly defined within the context of an interrogation of the category "conditions of possibility." Their opposition will be elaborated within the context of a placing in question of the category "opposition." Bataille's compression of opposed terms into a relation of intimacy, or contaminating proximity, will place in question the univocity of each term involved, within the context of the progressive definition of each term. The axis of this compression, referred to above as coincidence of two problematic relations, is called by Bataille a mise en jeu. At the level of this mise en jeu, the internal structures of the system, as well as their relation to a traditional or contemporary philosophical context, become the object of an aggressive and sustained problematization. If the first moment of the duality "closure/breach" describes an opposition of these terms, the second moment--that of the mise en jeu--may be said to describe their communication.

The focus of this basic movement within the Bataillian text is the generalized figure of identity to self, conceived as an integral totality. Bataille will affirm the absolute closure of this integrity, as in the case of the concept "discontinuity": "Nulle communication entre nous ne pourra supprimer une différence première. Si vous mourez, ce n'est pas moi qui meurs. Nous sommes, vous et moi, des êtres

discontinus" (E., p. 17). Secondly, through a series of stipulations regarding the ontological process of this closure (which take the form, in L'Erotisme and La Part maudite, of empirical observations from which ontological categories are loosely derived), Bataille will introduce as a condition of closure a factor which is simultaneously defined as a threat to integrity. In the case of the integrity called "discontinuity," this conditioning opposite is defined as "continuity," a concept of "life" whose predicates include a) a logical transcendence with regard to the integral or individual forms which are its incarnations; b) a "continuous" form whose economy, regulated by death and reproduction, produces apparently integral individuals as its moments or manifestations; and c) the empirical character of an "excess" over the capacity of containment represented by a living individual, this excess manifesting itself in the form of comportments irreducible to the necessity of self-preservation. Chief among these comportments is sexual reproduction, a "transfer" of energy "to the impersonality of life" (P.M., p. 75) which has, for the progenitor, the status of a disproportionately violent "perte sans profit": a donation of life which exceeds the progenitor's own lifetime and may involve its immediate death.

From the perspective of a "life" transcending discontinuity while incarnating itself only in the form of discontinuity, Bataille can contemplate the moment of survival as the essential comportment maintaining the unicity of a living creature. Survival is the struggle to subsist in an integral form, and is thus directed against the general economy of continuity, whose axis is death. Yet the struggle against

that which exceeds integrity is animated by the very excess which incarnates integrity. Closure is the modality of manifestation of that which is precisely irreducible to closure. "Mais l'homme n'est pas seulement l'être séparé qui dispute sa part de ressources au monde vivant. . . . Le mouvement d'exsudation (de dilapidation) de la matière vivante l'anime, et il ne saurait l'arrêter . . ." (P.M., p. 62). In addition, the integrity of the biological closure of discontinuity is empirically defined as an economy of exchange whose components are living "elements" which are in a process of incessant death and reproduction: "Ce que tu es tient à l'activité qui lie les éléments sans nombre qui te composent, à l'intense communication de ces éléments entre eux. Ce sont des contagions d'énergie . . . ou des transferts d'éléments, qui constituent intérieurement la vie de ton être organique" (E.I., 111). The isolated being whose closure is directed against a transcendent general economy is itself constituted by a region of that general economy, circumscribed as a paradoxical and indeed illusory "self": "Où tu voudras saisir ta substance intemporelle, tu ne rencontres qu'un glissement, que les jeux mal coordonnés de tes éléments périssables" (E.I., 111).

Conceived as "discontinuity," closure is an integrity which must be defined as the exuberance of its opposite. Discontinuity is continuity. Considered metaphorically as a container of energy, discontinuity is the paradoxical enclosure of an excess. Considered within the context of survival as a perpetual process of containment, discontinuity is a closure forced by an excess (a closure animated by an excess). It is a closure whose modality must be defined as an opening--excess--and this is the most basic sense of the concept "dépense."²

Closure as discontinuity is the violence of an économie générale, paradoxically experienced as an integrity which would be threatened from without. In other words, closure is a communication before it may be considered as a discontinuity. It is an "inachèvement" before it is an integrity. It is always excessively closed and never closed enough.

Thus the compression of the concepts of transcendent excess and ineluctable closure into the intimacy of a mise en jeu defines ipseity not as an originary identity which seeks to protect itself, but rather as an economy of violence which seeks to create itself as closure.

Ce n'est pas en tant que chose définie que l'homme
se heurte à la nature. . . .

C'est comme effort d'autonomie. (C., p. 376)

Identity to self is not a "substance intemporelle," but rather the violence of a process or the paradoxical moment of an economy. As a mode of being, it is defined as a "glissement": a paradoxical entrapment between two modes of being--excess and enclosure--which constitute it simultaneously. The glissement is a violence opposing violence; an excess which reduces excess; a communication opposing communication. Its most important ontological predicate in Bataille's thought is the impossibility of its own self-coincidence: "la sauvage impossibilité que je suis, qui ne peut éviter ses limites, et ne peut non plus s'y tenir" (C., p. 261).

The concepts of the effort d'autonomie, the glissement, and the impossible define a mode of being whose exigency toward closure is trapped in a paradoxical solidarity with its exigency toward excess or loss. The unicity of this being is the contamination of this exigency.

Closure, then, whether defined as the global figure "identity to self" or as one of several regional figures in Bataille's system (prohibition, knowledge, etc.), is properly an inachèvement: a process of "completion" whose "incompletion" is the very excess of its movement toward integrity. Conceived as an originary homogeneity, closure is an impossibility; yet the tension of its exigency is the ineluctable unicity of the "discontinuous" in Bataille, and most particularly of subjectivity.

Considered as an exigency of inachèvement, closure in Bataille is an intense moment linking predicates which tend to abolish each other. It is the central figure of a logic which, while tending toward an entirely communicational framework, nevertheless concentrates its interrogation upon the compelling violence of the notion of unicity. It is in the course of this interrogation that the simplicity of the breach becomes the contamination of an excess which conditions closure. Within this context, those ontological predicates implied by the principle of identity to self, understood as a principle of non-contradiction, are foreclosed or withdrawn precisely by that process which grounds unicity as an ineluctable moment of being. The prefix "im-" applied as an authentic logical condition to the notion of the "possible" ("capable of being or occurring"), designates unicity as a mode of being for which the complementary notions of identity, capability, power, and activity are insufficient predicates. At the same time, the closure of an inachèvement is yet more intense in its excess than the integrity of an identity to self. With relation to this contaminated logical moment, Bataille's discursive procedures, whether aphoristic or expository, organize themselves with striking regularity, even as they

are rendered most difficult by that very relation. From this perspective, the unusual resistance of the Bataillian text may be understood to result from a movement which not only problematizes its own interrogative tools, but also attempts to problematize its own status as the aggressive exigency of philosophical pertinence.³

It is within the context of a series of problematic terms, often invoked substitutively in subtle displacements of context, that the concept of the exigency is elaborated in Bataille's text. Two such terms will develop a central significance and will be repeatedly invoked with increasing intensity. They are "transgression" and "expérience" or "expérience intérieure." These two terms will define the exigency as a fundamental comportment of subjectivity (transgression) and as a basic ontological predicate of subjectivity considered in its totality (expérience). Together they will describe a subject whose mode of being is defined by the concept that he can or must transgress; a subject whose definition as the difficult concept "expérience" must precede his definition as an integral receptivity or intentional "self." These difficult conditions are rendered inevitable by the precedence of a mise en jeu which, when applied to closure, defines closure itself as a mise en jeu.

Prohibition

An intentional subject conceived ontologically as the exigency of a problematic closure is not defined, in Bataille's text, as an originary receptivity which would be neutral or mechanical. Instead, intentionality itself is defined as the inescapable priority of a form

of closure. This closure is the interdit. Its primacy in the context of cognition or intentionality is the primacy of the effort d'autonomie as a basic comportment or predicate of ipseity. The interdit is a contamination of the notion of a receptivity defined as an originary comprehension--however limited or approximate--which would be opened and conditioned by an adequate breach between subject and object. Bataille's invocation of the interdit as an integral moment of the cognitive function of consciousness, and the resulting definition of cognition as a "contaminated" vision, are designations of subjectivity as a moment or comportment for which the predicate "comprehension" is simultaneously excessive and insufficient (as is the predicate "integrity" for the moment of closure).⁴ The empirical reference for this notion of contamination in Bataille's text is the universality of prohibitions regarding death and sexuality in human societies, and a complementary devotion of the human community to work and to a logic of utility which would be solidary with the comportment of work. For Bataille, an institutionalized blindness to that aspect of life which transcends survival is the condition for the unicity of a logic of utility which commands the "profane" world of work.⁵ Within this context Bataille posits, as a condition for the manipulative protention of tool manufacture and use, the abolition of the affective protention that would envisage a cadaver. As a condition for the identity to self of a tool or person, conceived in terms of utility, he posits a proscription of sexuality and death conceived as revelations of life transcending identity to self.⁶ A necessary primacy of utility in the world of survival is conditioned by a banishment of that which exceeds the logic

of utility--until the day of the fête. On this day, that which was prohibited is permitted or even demanded. Animal or human sacrifices, ritual destructions of goods, and other "dilapidations" become the object of a bizarre, positive sanction which Bataille thematizes as the upsurge of an exigency of loss, a dépense whose name is transgression.

At the ontological level which subtends the exuberance of Bataille's invocation of empirical data, a subtle and progressive application of conditions and articulations to the problem of subjectivity is pursued. The principal context of this strategy is the moment of imposition of the prohibition. This moment, conceived as a condition or constitution of that intentionality which is called "reason," is described prior to an assumption of the logic of identity and receptivity which informs the concept "reason." The duality "reason/affect" is provisionally and strategically invoked by Bataille in order to be problematized by the notion that prohibition, which banishes a form of "affect," is itself an "affective" reaction. A reduction of the "violence" represented by death and sexuality is not the proprietary act of a previously defined "reason," an adequate receptivity which would feel its clarity threatened from without. "Violence" will rather be reduced by "violence" itself, conceived as affect:

Mais les interdits, sur lesquels repose le monde de la raison, ne sont pas, pour autant, rationnels. Au départ, une opposition calme à la violence n'aurait pas suffi à trancher entre les deux mondes: si l'opposition n'avait elle-même en quelque manière participé à la violence . . . la seule raison n'aurait pu définir avec assez d'autorité les limites du glissement. L'horreur, l'effroi irraisonnés pouvaient seuls subsister en face de déchainements démesurés. Telle est la nature du tabou, qui rend possible un monde du calme et de la raison, mais est lui-même, en son principe, un tremblement. . . . (E., p. 71)

Thus Bataille's use of the concepts "reason" and "affect" has the function of a problematization of these concepts, or a tendency to redefine the context of their opposition. The "participation in violence" of the intentional act which imposes the interdit is not the contamination of an already-defined "reason" by an already-defined "affect." Rather, it is the priority of the basic Bataillian category "excess" in the elaboration of any thematization of intentionality or cognition. Notions such as "horreur" and "effroi," considered as moments of an exigency of closure before they would be defined as "emotions," insert the violence of the glissement and the effort d'autonomie into the economy of the concept "reason." In this way, "reason" is defined as an exigency, even as the terms of its definition appear to presuppose it as an adequate receptivity. Intentionality, conditioned by a prohibition whose predicate is violence, will have no component which would escape the priority of this violence. Cognition will be conditioned by the same problematic closure which defines subjectivity as a discontinuity.

"Horreur" or "effroi," conceived as exigencies, have the Bataillian predicate "excess" and the complementary condition "closure." As motivations of the act that reduces what Bataille above calls a glissement, they must also be defined as a glissement: the excessive violence of an exigency of closure. The movement that reduces violence is itself violence. The interdit is a closure whose condition is excess: a closure forced by excess. Intentionality, conceived as an opening within closure, is itself immediately conditioned by closure in the form of prohibition. Intentionality is prohibition. But it is prohibition as violence, prohibition as glissement. It is in this context

that the interdit's function as a barrier is conditioned by its definition as a "tremblement."

Bataille's text refers directly to this problematic of excess within closure, in the context of prohibition, through the term desire. "L'interdit observé autrement que dans l'effroi n'a plus la contrepartie de désir qui en est le sens profond" (E., p. 42). Desire is the modality of the exigency, and functions not only as the opposite but also as the condition for the apparently univocal "effroi." It is in this sense that the interdit as a problematic limit functions as a moment in an economy of violence, and prepares a complementary moment: the moment of transgression. "Il est essentiel à l'homme de refuser la violence du mouvement naturel, mais le refus ne signifie pas la rupture, il annonce au contraire un accord plus profond" (E., p. 76).

The concept "dépense," when applied to the problematic of prohibition and transgression, will differentiate a violent exigency toward survival or integrity from another exigency whose increased momentum inclines an intentional subject toward loss. The axis of this differentiation will be this momentum or this "excess of excess" that momentarily exceeds the basic mobilization of violence in the direction of closure. More fundamental than the opposition of these two moments, however, is their solidarity as exigencies. It is this solidarity which defines the interdit as "une invite en même temps qu'un obstacle" (L.M., p. 21) and which defines the sacred world, with its coincidence of the pure and the impure, and its exigency of abandon, as a production of the interdit: "l'interdit divinise ce dont il défend l'accès" (L.M., p. 21). Bataille's formula, "l'interdit est là pour être violé"

(E., p. 71), must not be understood as a declaration of the meta-physical priority of abandon over limits, but as one index of an ontological dimension for which obstacles and their destruction are not ultimate predicates. Writing of this context, Denis Hollier has correctly stated that "la position de l'interdit est en quelque sorte déjà une transgression."⁷

In his essay "L'Expérience-limite,"⁸ Maurice Blanchot, with a fundamental awareness of the basic solidarity of violence and its limits in Bataille's thought, clearly perceives the excess hidden within the interdit's apparently univocal function as a barrier. Although he structures his reading of Bataille by means of his own terms, which are highly personal and original, the unique discursive movement of Bataille's text is easily perceptible in these terms. Speaking of intentionality as a closure whose modality is an excess, Blanchot describes the peculiar violence of the "profane world" in the following form:

Tout se passe, en vérité, comme si l'homme disposait d'une capacité de mourir qui dépasse de beaucoup et en quelque sorte infiniment ce qu'il lui faut pour entrer dans la mort et, de cet excès de mourir, il a su se faire admirablement un pouvoir; par ce pouvoir, niant la nature, il a construit le monde, il s'est mis au travail, il est devenu producteur, auto-producteur. ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 583)

The closure which is survival is forced by an economic factor which must be defined as an excess. This excess, mobilized as containment, is an "excès de mourir" transcending survival and paradoxically incarnated as survival. In this context, work is not defined as a productive power reducible to the concept of negativity, but rather as an excess and an exigency ironically subordinated to the value of production. "Cela est admirable, l'homme parvient au contentement par la

décision d'un mécontentement incessant" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 581).

Prohibition is not the protection of a "reason" which would be menaced from without by violence; rather, it is the exigency of reason, paradoxically presenting itself as the non-violence of a profane knowledge. Thus, it is an inachèvement contaminating the totality of the profane world. Its inability to equal the totalizations of a negativity is precisely its exceeding of negativity--an excess which has simultaneously the form of an irreducible remainder or reste ("cet excès de mourir"), and the form of a gap or breach within the absolute closure of a totality, which Blanchot calls desire: "le désir de l'homme sans désir, l'insatisfaction de celui qui est satisfait 'en tout,' le pur défaut, là où il y a cependant accomplissement d'être et toute-puissance et toute-sagesse" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 582). A desire which cannot be assuaged because it does not arise from a lack or need is the sign of a closure which is never closed enough: a closure which is an excess.

It is true, as Blanchot states, that desire will lead to "un surplus de néant," "une part de mourir" that a subject "ne peut investir dans l'activité": "une autre exigence, celle non plus de produire, mais de dépenser" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 583). But this exigency will not signal a destruction of closure or the abolition of limits. The mode of being of a subjectivity defined as an exigency will not be transformed by the momentum of its own excess. Rather, it will be led, in Bataille's words, to "l'extrême du possible" or to a "dernier degré de la tension." Blanchot calls this momentum and the extremity to which it leads an "exigence dont la limite est donnée dans

'l'expérience intérieure'" (L'Expérience-limite, p. 583). This limit-case of the tense contamination which is subjectivity, this "last degree" of a unicity conceived as excess, will be transgression.

Transgression

The interdit is a condition for the operation of intentionality within the context of the exigency of closure. It is not an historical presence. It is not the residue of a vicious ancestral tradition. It is not the inheritance of an anonymous, punctual imposition that would remain to contaminate the originary clarity of a consciousness adequate to its objects. On the contrary, the interdit is the very adequation of an intentional act and its object under the sign of utility and of its complement, identity. The interdit is a contamination of cognition, which at the same time is the very condition for cognitive "clarity." Its imposition is not a punctual moment, but is rigorously contemporaneous with the exuberance of a multiplicity of intentional acts. As the axis of a closure that banishes violence from the "world of things," however, the interdit is an exigency which is animated by that very violence. It prepares, calls for, invites, and even "participates in" a violence that it simultaneously renders inaccessible. It forbids that which it creates: the sacred world. Nevertheless, as the violence of the exigency gains momentum, an event occurs which apparently ruptures the solidity of the profane world through a violent abandonment of all its prescriptions and prohibitions. At this moment the interdit is violated. Bataille's text concentrates its interrogation upon the modality and conditions of the possibility of this violation.

If the perpetual closure of the effort d'autonomie defines the very unicity of the self, and if the primacy of the interdit conditions the very capacity of intentionality of a conscious self, how may an exigency toward loss accomplish the violation of an interdit? How may a discontinuity transgress?

The answer to this question lies in a Bataillian procedure which problematizes the notions of power and accomplishment through its basic mise en jeu of their complement, the notion of identity as integrity. Within this context, the "problem of possibility" will be the background for a transgression which "exceeds without destroying" a profane world of prohibitions:

La transgression excède sans le détruire un monde profane, dont elle est le complément. La société humaine n'est pas seulement le monde du travail. Simultanément--ou successivement--le monde profane et le monde sacré la composent, qui en sont les deux formes complémentaires. Le monde profane est celui des interdits. Le monde sacré s'ouvre à des transgressions limitées. (E., p. 75, my emphasis)

The coincidence of simultaneity and succession in Bataille's formulation refers to a fundamental solidarity of prohibition and transgression which underlies their apparent alternation in a temporal perspective. This solidarity is the structure of the glissement, considered as the more basic movement through which prohibition and transgression, or the profane and sacred worlds, condition and contaminate each other. The mode of succession is added to that of simultaneity according to the basic model of dépense. Violence moves toward greater violence. The experience of limits moves toward its own limit. Transgression, in Bataille's words, is "limited" because it is not a violence which would destroy closure. It is rather a violence that exceeds closure

while paradoxically remaining trapped within its limit.⁹ Transgression is the "complement" of closure, and not its destruction. This is because the limit is not an entity whose mode of being would be transgression's "other." On the contrary, the modality "excess within containment" defines both these concepts. Their coincidence in the constitution of a subjectivity conceived as an exigency is not that of an alterity, but rather that of a glissement. This coincidence is stipulated by Bataille in many ways. For instance, he will declare that the violation of an interdit is not an act that abolishes reason: "si raisonnables que nous devenions, une violence peut à nouveau nous dominer qui n'est plus la violence naturelle, qui est la violence d'un être de raison" (E., pp. 45-6). "Reason," defined as a primacy of utility, or a "primate de l'avenir" motivating intentionality, is not a victim of the mise en jeu, but rather an integral part of its constitution. "La nature humaine ne peut comme telle rejeter le souci de l'avenir: les états où cette préoccupation ne nous touche plus sont au-dessus ou au-dessous de l'homme" (S.N., p. 54). In another formulation, Bataille will deny that "animality," conceived as a comportment unencumbered by reason, may be invoked as a predicate for transgression: "La transgression de l'interdit n'est pas la violence animale. C'est la violence encore, exercée par un être susceptible de raison . . ." (E., p. 72). The sense of these conditions, and of the many others invoked by Bataille, is that transgression requires prohibition not simply as the historical imposition of a barrier to be destroyed, but as the contemporaneous imposition of a limit whose violation is not a destruction. "De toute façon, l'homme appartient à l'un et à l'autre

de ces deux mondes, entre lesquels sa vie, quoi qu'il veuille, est déchirée" (E., pp. 45-6).

Michel Foucault, within the historical epistemological context of his essay on Bataille entitled "Préface à la transgression,"¹⁰ strategically posits transgression as the generalized comportment of an ostensibly liberated modernity that would no longer recognize a complex of traditional constraints. His immediate application of the duality "interdit/transgression" to this modernity, in the context of sexuality, is the following statement: "Nous n'avons pas libéré la sexualité, mais nous l'avons, exactement, portée à la limite . . ." ("Préface . . . , p. 751). The context of this declaration is the notion of a sexuality-eroticism to which reason, defined as the constraint of prohibition, is not subservient but integral. Of such a sexuality, Foucault writes:

Ce n'est donc pas par elle que nous communiquons avec le monde ordonné et heureusement profane des animaux; elle est plutôt scissure: non pas autour de nous pour nous isoler ou nous désigner, mais pour tracer la limite en nous et nous dessiner nous-mêmes comme limite. ("Préface . . . , p. 751)

A sexuality defined as transgression or eroticism cannot be described in the terms of liberation. The mise en jeu, as Foucault states, cannot be thematized as an abolition of limits. It must rather be conceived as the limit-case of an im-possible closure whose modality is not only constraint but also "tremblement." Against this background, the relative sexual abandon of animality is correctly perceived by Foucault in Bataillian terms as a "happy" but indifferent "profanity" that has neither a positive nor a negative relation to the basic dilemma of subjectivity. "Humanity" is no more an originary animality upon which a prohibition would be imposed than it is an originary receptivity

upon which a contingent, contaminating motivation would be imposed.

It is rather the imposition of such a problematic closure or the process of such a closure in its very being.

A second basic elaboration of the concept of transgression in Bataille's text is the description of the sacrifice. Within this context, Bataille interprets the ritual destruction of goods, animals, or human beings through his terminology of the mise en jeu, the glissement, etc., and thereby develops a most basic ontological meaning for the term "sacrifice." Bataille recognizes the sacrifice as a direct, total destruction of the "discontinuity" of a victim in the context of a sacred ritual. But rather than thematize this event as a destruction of isolation, he sees it as a liberation for the victim alone, and concentrates his attention upon the ceremonial functions of the sacrificers.

La victime sera seule, en effet, à sortir entièrement de l'ordre réel, en ce qu'elle est seule portée jusqu'au bout par le mouvement de la fête. Le sacrificateur n'est divin qu'avec réticences. L'avenir est en lui lourdement réservé, l'avenir est sa pesanteur de chose. (P.M., p. 105)

Only for the victim does death bring an end to the mode of being which was its life. For the sacrificers, the ritual is an exigency that is brought by the victim's death to an ultimate tension and violence, but not to a resolution. The sacrifice destroys the unicity of a victim but it cannot destroy discontinuity itself, as the incarnation or manifestation of life. This irreducibility of the discontinuous as a remainder defying the negativity of the sacrifice is also the irreducibility of the "real," the "world of things," and of the "primat de l'avenir" as factors contaminating the totality of the sacred world.

Concomitant to the sacrifice's ambiguity of accomplishment is its ambiguity of intention. Bataille conceives the problem of an intentionality and a free will that would sacrifice in terms of the exigency. In his empirical demonstrations, this conception will have the effect of a contamination and a mise en jeu. Thus, the sacrificer "n'est divin qu'avec réticences." He is "divine," not "in spite of" his reticence or hesitancy, but because of it. The sacrifice is an event "fait d'un mélange d'angoisse et de frénésie" (P.M., p. 106) not because its violence triumphs over the hesitations of a unicity seeking to maintain itself, but because the tense conjunction of "angoisse" and "frénésie" constitutes this violence. It is in this sense that Bataille repeatedly refuses to accord a univocal primacy to the term "destruction," calling such a configuration an "absence de rigueur" (P.M., p. 106) or an "aveugle violence qui se réduit au déchaînement" (E., p. 115). "Celui qui s'abandonne à ce mouvement n'est plus humain . . ." (E., p. 115). The "rigor" of the sacrifice is precisely its status as a contamination: a bringing-into-proximity, "à l'extrême du possible," of an exigency toward closure and an exigency toward abandon. The compressed intimacy of these opposites (whose very opposition is, as we have seen, contaminated by their basic definition) is a glissement whose limit-case is transgression.

The description of the sacrifice as an exigency whose excess is entirely conditioned by closure creates a discursive dilemma that often takes the form of an apparent contradiction in Bataille's text. For instance, the transgression of a "reasonable being" is described as the act of a subject "qui tenta d'obéir, mais succombe au mouvement qu'en

lui-même il ne peut réduire à la raison" (E., p. 46). However, as we have read, "celui qui s'abandonne à ce mouvement n'est plus humain." Contradictions such as this result from a procedure which attempts to problematize familiar terms while necessarily employing these very terms with their multiple connotations. In the present case, a "mouvement which succumbs" must be invoked without the predicate of resolution which would generally accompany such a term. This is because the verb "to succumb" represents an exigency for which Bataille will refuse the verb "s'abandonner." This appropriation of familiar terms makes any reading of Bataille's text difficult; but the process of appropriation itself is not arbitrary. There would be no alternative to a procedure of this type, for the elaboration of a movement that "succumbs without being able to succumb," that "abandons without being able to abandon." The movement of the mise en jeu is a movement that, as exigency, exceeds a logic of free will and accomplishment. In other words, it exceeds a logic of possibility. "La sauvage impossibilité que je suis, qui ne peut éviter ses limites, et ne peut non plus s'y tenir," is a mode of being which always "must," and never "is able." Thus, the sacrifice is not the experience of the destruction of ipseity as closure, but rather the experience of the impossibility of such a destruction. The fête is the ritual sacrifice of that which cannot be sacrificed. As Maurice Blanchot stipulates in a footnote to his reading of the concept expérience, transgression is not an act of which a subject would be capable:

L'interdit marque le point où cesse le pouvoir. La transgression n'est pas un acte dont, dans certaines conditions, la puissance de certains hommes et leur maîtrise se montreraient encore capables. Elle désigne ce qui est

radicalement hors de portée: l'atteinte de l'inaccessible, le franchissement de l'infranchissable. Elle s'ouvre en l'homme lorsqu'en celui-ci le pouvoir cesse d'être la dimension ultime. ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 586)

Transgression is an experience that, as exigency, is neither voluntary nor involuntary. Another apparently contradictory Bataillian formula points to this problematization of the notion of power: "La multitude des êtres vivants est passive dans ce mouvement. A l'extrême, toutefois, nous voulons résolument ce qui met notre vie en danger" (E., p. 95). Transgression is the predicate of a subjectivity that, exceeding the category "identity to self" conceived as an originary integrity, also exceeds the context of accomplishment, activity, and power. Its discursive elaboration requires a mise en jeu of these categories, considered as the axes of a "logic of utility" whose primacy is inextricable from the exigency of knowledge itself, and is therefore ineluctable. Such a mise en jeu must itself be a transgression which sacrifices that which cannot be sacrificed.

The basic object of transgression, through its many incarnations in Bataille's text, is that closure which always conditions subjectivity itself, whatever the context of its definition. A transgression envisaging utility, "le bien," a "profane language," "l'intégrité du corps," or "knowledge," will always be the exigency of escape from a closure that will itself be revealed as an exigency. Thus, transgression will always have, in the terms of accomplishment, the status of a "failure" for Bataille. The sacrifice, desiring the glorious destruction of utility through integrity, becomes the spectacle of integrity's ineluctable persistence in the contamination of "la part maudite."

Crime, envisaging "le bien," finds itself to be always insufficiently criminal. Creative writing assaults the limits of a "profane language" only to find its explosive movement trapped in a problematic structure of reification. Communication or sexuality, desiring a penetration of "l'intégrité du corps," encounters a surface whose "blessure" or "nudity" is the very modality of its impenetrable closure. Penetration becomes the more contaminated contact called souillure. "Non-savoir," seeking to abolish or escape the servility of a profane "knowledge," becomes a new reification that will itself be defined as a glissement. In these and other contexts, a closure which is always excessively closed and yet insufficiently closed will define transgression as the "privileged failure" of an assault on a stubborn limit whose resistance is the fact that its own predicate is transgression. The context of this transgression which assaults transgression is the context of the im-possible.

Michel Foucault, strategically conceiving the aggressivity of transgression as the metaphorical rupture of an ineluctable limit, attempts the description of this movement in a series of bold formulas. Initially he imagines a passage over a limit which disappears at the moment of passage:

Une telle expérience, en laquelle éclate la mort de Dieu, découvre comme son secret et sa lumière, sa propre finitude, le règne illimité de la Limite, le vide de ce franchissement où elle défaille et fait défaut. En ce sens l'expérience intérieure est tout entière expérience de l'impossible (l'impossible étant ce dont on fait l'expérience et ce qui la constitue). ("Préface à la transgression," p. 753)

The limit disappears at the moment of passage, demonstrating the inadequacy of that movement as access to the limit's "beyond." The

limit is not at the point of rupture. The im-possible is the rupture of a limit which incessantly reconstructs itself behind the subject to exercise its totalitarian influence from another place:

Le jeu des limites et de la transgression semble être régi par une obstination simple: la transgression franchit et ne cesse de recommencer à franchir une ligne qui, derrière elle, aussitôt se referme en une vague de peu de mémoire, reculant ainsi à nouveau jusqu'à l'horizon de l'infranchissable. ("Préface à la transgression," pp. 754-5)

The movement of a rupture which does not rupture, in spite of its trajectory and efficiency, is the paradoxical transitivity of the impossible. And this is precisely the movement of closure in Bataille's text: the closure which contains more than it can contain. However, since the various conditions mobilized by Bataille's categories as a group do not ultimately permit even the metaphorical concept of a momentary rupture, the movement of transgression may perhaps be better described by a spiral, in which the limit displaces itself to accompany the movement of rupture in whatever direction:

La transgression n'est donc pas à la limite comme le noir est au blanc, le défendu au permis, l'extérieur à l'intérieur, l'exclu à l'espace protégé de la demeure. Elle lui est plutôt liée selon un rapport en vrille dont aucune effraction simple ne peut venir à bout. ("Préface à la transgression," p. 755)

The limit is the infranchissable. The impossible is that movement which pursues, and whose very being is to pursue, the limit in its perpetual, receding displacement. At the same time, however, there is in Bataille's thought a movement from violence to greater violence: an "excess of excess," a dépense whose momentum differentiates prohibition from transgression and leads from the possible to the extremity of the possible. Within the movement of the spiral, another moment must be invoked to

describe the violence of an increased proximity to the limit. This is the moment of imminence:

La transgression porte la limite jusqu'à la limite de son être; elle la conduit à s'éveiller sur sa disparition imminente, à se retrouver dans ce qu'elle exclut (plus exactement à s'y reconnaître pour la première fois), à éprouver sa vérité positive dans le mouvement de sa perte. Et pourtant, en ce mouvement de pure violence, vers quoi la transgression se déchaîne-t-elle, sinon vers ce qui l'enchaîne, vers la limite et ce qui s'y trouve enclos? ("Préface à la transgression," p. 755)

The notion of imminence describes the violence of a glissement, a mise en jeu which gains momentum in an assault on its own limits. Imminence is the modality of violence at the limit: the temporality of impossible transgression. This is the violence of a destruction whose failure to accomplish itself (in the form of a synthesizing resolution to the contaminated violence of the effort d'autonomie) does not lessen, but indeed heightens its imperious urgency as the ontological condition of closure itself. Subjectivity's closure is an imminent freedom from limits, imminent violence, imminent death. Imminence, conceived as duration without end, is the temporality of subjectivity's "must"--the glissement--at its extremity.

Incapable of Being

The problem of transgression considered as a punctual moment of violence or as an extremity leads to the more basic problem of transgression in solidarity with prohibition considered as a predicate of subjectivity itself. The momentum gained by violence in Bataille's text is not a sudden and radical mise en jeu of an integrity which would originally have been self-coincident and untroubled. It is rather the

"limit-case" of a closure which was "always-already" a mise en jeu. Considered as the "limit-case" of a glissement, transgression is an ultimate proximity of two modes of being--closure and destruction--whose abolition of each other, whose respective entry into being as totalities, is imminent. The violence situated by Bataille within the context of his various "non-violent" terms, however, defines the predicate "imminence" itself as an "always-already." Closure, from the beginning, is an exigency which is about to complete itself. In this sense, subjectivity is always transgression considered as an imminent closure whose modality is an imminent destruction. The extraordinary difficulty of a temporal formulation of Bataille's categories is demonstrated in the following description by Maurice Blanchot of a subjectivity which transgresses after always having transgressed:

Si l'homme n'appartenait déjà en quelque façon à ce détour dont il ne se sert le plus souvent que pour s'en détourner, comment pourrait-il s'engager dans ce chemin qui bientôt fait défaut, en vue de ce qui échappe à toute vue, s'avançant comme à reculons vers un point dont il sait seulement qu'il n'y parviendra pas en personne. . . . ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 590)

Like Blanchot's Thomas, whose forward motion is animated solely by his desire not to move, Bataillian subjectivity transgresses through the very force of its exigency toward closure. This motion is the expérience conceived as an ipseity whose integrity is always imminent. "Jamais le moi n'a été le sujet de l'expérience; je n'y parvient jamais," writes Blanchot ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 590). But at the same time, "je" never arrives at the previous punctual moment of its own selfhood. In this sense "l'expérience-limite représente pour la pensée comme une nouvelle origine" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 589). The extremity of

transgression defines the exigency, or the expérience, as the very modality of the self's fugitive, violent coincidence with itself. The most violent placing in question of the self's closure is the ontological process of that very closure.

Michel Foucault, through his interrogation of transgression as "une profanation dans un monde qui ne reconnaît plus de sens positif au sacré" ("Mais que veut dire tuer Dieu s'il n'existe pas, tuer Dieu qui n'existe pas? Peut-être à la fois tuer Dieu parce qu'il n'existe pas et pour qu'il n'existe pas. . . , " "Préface . . . , " pp. 752-3) also arrives at the conclusion that a subjectivity defined as transgression is a mode of being whose own being is as much in question as that of the limit. "Le trait qu'elle croise pourrait bien être tout son espace" ("Préface . . . , " p. 754).

Mais la limite a-t-elle une existence véritable en dehors du geste qui glorieusement la traverse et la nie? Que serait-elle, après, et que pouvait-elle être, avant? Et la transgression n'épuise-t-elle tout ce qu'elle est dans l'instant où elle franchit la limite, n'étant nulle part ailleurs qu'en ce point du temps? . . . ce point, cet étrange croisement d'êtres qui, hors de lui, n'existent pas. . . . ("Préface . . . , " p. 755)

Transgression, initially an assault on limits by an aggressive self which contests its selfhood, redefines this self as a paradoxical inachèvement whose fugitive entry into being tends to escape the overall context of barriers and aggressivity. "Elle n'est pas violence dans un monde partagé (dans un monde éthique) ni triomphe sur des limites qu'elle efface (dans un monde dialectique ou révolutionnaire). . . . Elle affirme l'être limité, elle affirme cet illimité dans lequel elle bonde, en l'ouvrant pour la première fois à l'existence" ("Préface . . . , " p. 756).

How may an ontological category be coherently applied to a mode of being for which such notions as "transgression/limits" or even "closure" are proximate only to the point of a complex and difficult metaphoricity? Michel Foucault, whose manipulations of metaphorical formulations are so masterful, acknowledges both a necessity and an impossibility of thinking transgression in terms of being. Maurice Blanchot more radically states this impossibility by indicating multiple directions of escape by which Bataillian subjectivity exceeds implicit predicates of the category "being." In this context, a subjectivity whose unicity is its very failure to coincide with itself as a "substance intemporelle" fails to have "being" conceived as the positive closure guaranteed by an adequate negativity: "l'homme se voit assigner, entre être et néant et à partir de l'infini de cet entre-deux accueilli comme rapport, le statut de sa nouvelle souveraineté, celle d'un être sans être dans le devenir sans fin d'une mort impossible à mourir" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 589). A being defined as an exigency perpetually fails to enter into "being" defined as "possibility": It is a being "incapable of being or occurring." The modality of its presence or self-presence is not that of a plentitude, but rather that of a glissement or an effort d'autonomie; and as such it is "la présence sans rien de présent" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 589). Its exigency toward closure is, in the terms of a logic of accomplishment, an incessant failure to coincide with itself; and such a failure never accedes to the integral rectitude of the ex-perire. Thus Blanchot calls the interior experience an "expérience de la non-expérience" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 590).

A being whose unicity is neither a self-coincidence, nor a self-presence, nor a totalization, but rather an im-possibility, is a being which paradoxically "se tient au-dessus, en dehors de l'être et ne relève donc pas plus de l'ontologie que de la dialectique" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 589). Failing to achieve the presence of a self-coincidence, it necessarily fails to offer itself to the engulfing transitivity of a "dévoilement" or a comprehension. Its only punctual present is, in Foucault's words, a "vague de peu de mémoire." For Blanchot, this unicity--the unicity of an exigency--is simply beyond memory as retention or comprehension: "l'expérience est cette exigence, elle n'est que comme exigence et telle qu'elle ne se propose jamais comme accomplie, puisque nul souvenir ne pourrait nous confirmer qu'elle a eu lieu, puisqu'elle dépasse toute mémoire et que seul l'oubli peut-être est à sa mesure . . ." (L'Expérience-limite," pp. 591-2). Escaping presence, protention and retention, the expérience makes its appearance in a different universe of manifestation for which Blanchot's oubli or fascination and Bataille's non-savoir are experimental predicates.

A precedence of forgetfulness over comprehension results from the paradox of a being whose only presence is an imminence; whose only integrity is a glissement. The question posed at the beginning of this chapter--"Does a rupture of integrity take place?"--is itself contaminated by the momentum of the Bataillan mise en jeu. The expérience, "ce qui échappe à notre pouvoir même d'en faire l'épreuve, mais à l'épreuve duquel nous ne saurions échapper" (L'Expérience-limite," p. 586), never "takes place," never has the capability of entering into being as a "possibility," never reveals itself as a presence. Instead, it

always "awaits" ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 586) "behind" the unicity of the possible ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 586), "beside" the transitivity of a comprehension ("Préface . . . ," p. 760).

A transgression defined as the tension of a mise en jeu is never able to bring a synthesizing resolution to the contamination of a closure which is itself defined as a mise en jeu. The priority of contamination over integrity--the priority of the exigency over the accomplishment--is the movement by which Bataillian subjectivity progressively exceeds the context of "possibility" with its multiple implicit predicates. The most immediate of these predicates, and perhaps the most basic among them, is the notion of power. Like Bataille himself, Maurice Blanchot and Michel Foucault are constrained to describe this movement in the terms of a philosophical language whose perennial horizon is the context of power. This constraint, and the extraordinary creativity which responds to it, constitute one index of Bataille's originality. Another, and perhaps more important index, is Bataille's recognition of constraint itself as an ineluctable component of a necessarily contaminated exigency toward comprehension. It is this recognition which so convincingly pre-empts an interpretation of Bataille's thought as transgression that, exploding the servile limits of a profane savoir, would herald the advent of a long-awaited "perte du sens." The failure of thought to constitute itself as the solidity of a barrier is the irreducible excess of its own affirmative "contestation," a movement for which both Foucault and Blanchot propose the metaphor of a "coup de dés", following Mallarmé ("L'Expérience-limite," p. 589; "Préface . . . ," p. 762). These thinkers correctly perceive

transgression as the movement of a subjectivity whose closure exceeds closure itself--a movement for which the context of limits and the power to destroy limits is not sufficient. It is within the tense dimension of this inescapable but always incomplete closure that, in Blanchot's words, "la pensée pense plus qu'elle ne peut penser."

Notes

¹Le Coupable, p. 263. References to this book, and to L'Expérience intérieure, will follow the pagination of volume V of Bataille's Oeuvres complètes (Gallimard, 1973). References to Sur Nietzsche will follow the pagination of volume VI of the same collection. The following abbreviations will be used: E.I. (L'Expérience intérieure); C. (Le Coupable); S.N. (Sur Nietzsche); E. (L'Erotisme, 10/18, 1970); P.M. (La Part maudite, Minuit "Points," 1967); L.M. (La Littérature et le mal, Gallimard "Idées," 1972).

²The concept "dépense" governs an "excessive" exigency toward closure as well as the violence of an exigency toward loss.

³For a discussion of the problem of the exigency considered as the comportment of philosophical investigation, see below. Cf. also J. Derrida, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale," in L'Écriture et la différence (Seuil, 1967), pp. 369-408.

⁴The interdit, envisaged ontologically, defines subjectivity as a moment within the real for which such predicates as "negativity," "mediation," or "manifestation" are problematic. For the notion of excess, conceived as the insistence of an economy within the closure of a discontinuity (or as the paradoxically communicational axis of a process of closure) is also the notion of a reste or remainder which is not eliminated by the movement of a negativity. It is this remainder within negativity, eventually to be named la part maudite, that designates closure in Bataille as a glissement rather than an integrity, and that conditions a general economy conceived in the terms of communication. Bataille's aphoristic "tout ce qui est--est trop" (E.I., p. 228) may be partially understood as a statement of this dual valence of the concept "excess," which indicates a defying of totalization or reification on the basis of a more basic failure of negativity to open an interval adequate to comprehension. That which is "too much" is always "too close" to take the properly phenomenal form of an intentional object. Cf. also Jean-François Fourny, "Les Avatars de l'interdit dans l'oeuvre de Bataille" in SFR, 1982 Fall-Winter; 6(2-3): 271-281; Mariella Bettarini, "Bataille: L'Interdetto e la transgressione" in Prospetti 41-2: 72-4.

⁵ Cf. E., pp. 42-3.

⁶ Cf. E., p. 50.

⁷ "Le Matérialisme dualiste de Georges Bataille," Tel Quel 25 (1966), p. 48.

⁸ La Nouvelle Revue Française, 118 (1962), pp. 577-92. Reprinted, with slight revisions, as "L'Affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative," in L'Entretien infini (Gallimard, 1969), pp. 300-13.

⁹ The non-synthetic character of this "exceeding of closure" is now explicitly stipulated by most readers of Bataille, although the extent of its influence in his system is seldom recognized. For a discussion of this movement, see below. Cf. also Derrida, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale," pp. 404-7; L'Érotisme, p. 43n; Hollier, "Le matérialisme dualiste de Georges Bataille," p. 50.

¹⁰ In Critique, 195-6 (1963), pp. 751-69.

CHAPTER III

BATAILLIAN SAVOIR, NON-SAVOIR, GLISSEMENT, RIRE

A multiplicity of dual oppositions structures Bataille's system. These oppositions are individually developed according to a stable, repeated configuration. The specificity of Bataille's categories, considered as a factor governing their substitutive invocations and multiple contexts, is perceptible only as a function of this specialized configuration of opposition. The purpose of this chapter will be to describe certain structures of opposition found in Bataille's text, in the context of their relation to that zone of his system which may be termed "knowledge."

On a most basic level, the Bataillian opposition may be described as a confrontation of two terms which places in question the ontological status of the space designated by their proximity. The terms, whose immediate relation is given as non-toleration, will be further articulated by Bataille according to a model of compressed intimacy or contiguity whose violence will be described as a mise en jeu. This mise en jeu is simultaneously a mise en question. For instance, the terms "continuity" and "discontinuity" will designate a concept of ipseity whose radical closure is in question. The terms "prohibition" and "transgression" will describe, with their complement "dépense," a concept of "escape from closure" whose possibility or accomplishment

is in question. The terms "savoir" and non-savoir" will designate a mode of cognition whose status as a reification is in question. These oppositions, along with such others as "sacred/profane," "poetry/prosaism," "sovereignty/servility," "individual/community," etc., will describe in their totality a meditation upon the ontological problem of an ineluctable closure which is always given as "in question." The category "uncertain closure," as it is applied to the general problem of subjectivity in Bataille's texts, will be given many names. The most basic, and the most often repeated, of these names, will be "la communication." This name will stand for a subjectivity defined (through a repeated structure of opposition) as a mise en jeu.

The procedure which develops the mise en jeu from a basic opposition has a characteristic form in Bataille's text. Its first term designates a form of closure, and is invoked as an ineluctable fact by Bataille. Invariably, its introduction is accompanied by a negative value judgment. Within the context of the basic ontological integrity of a subject, this term will be "separation," "isolation," or "discontinuity." In a perceptual or intentional context, the term will be "homogeneity," or, later, "the profane vision," or simply "savoir." In the context of subjectivity, the term will be "prohibition." In every case, the term "closure" will have the status of a form of integrity whose ostensible non-violence is derived from an evacuation of a form of violence. Thus, discontinuity is invoked as an opposition to the violence of continuity, considered as a destructive economy of life and death. Prohibition is invoked as an opposition to transgression, considered as an excess which threatens a subject's integrity.

Homogeneity is invoked as an evacuation of heterogeneity, considered as an affective function of subjectivity which would compromise the effectiveness of a cognitive form of reification. The primary term of non-violence or integrity is judged negatively, but is always invoked as an inevitability. No alternative will be offered for the closure which is "discontinuity": "nous sommes des êtres discontinus." The articulation of discontinuity with the concept of a struggle for survival will introduce the relation "utility," in the intentional context of homogeneity of knowledge, and no alternative will be offered for this relation: "notre seul possible est le travail."¹ The same articulation will establish the imposition of the interdit as an integral function of subjectivity, and again no alternative will be offered.² Closure, even though defined as contingent, is ineluctable.

The second term of the Bataillian opposition, whose initial predicate is "violence" or "escape from closure," will be invoked as a violence against which integrity is directed. This violence will be judged positively by Bataille, and will be accorded a relative primacy over integrity or closure, in two basic ways. In the first place, the primary term "opposition to violence" is shown to presuppose the term to which it is opposed. The reification of homogeneity will presuppose the heterogeneity it reduces.³ Discontinuity, as a moment in an economy of life and death, will presuppose that economy in its basic definition as "individual life" or "mortal life."⁴ Prohibition will presuppose transgression through its very opposition to the latter.⁵ Secondly, and much more importantly, the term "non-violence" is shown to partake of, participate in, or be animated by, the violence to

which it is opposed. Discontinuity, which devotes its energy to a struggle for survival which opposes the violence of continuity, must derive that energy from life itself, which is defined as a continuity of energy transcending the life span of the isolated being.⁶ Prohibition, defined as a comportment which aggressively outlaws transgression, thereby participates in the violence of that very transgression.⁷ Prohibition prepares transgression, calls to transgression as its complement and violent end. "L'interdit est là pour être violé."⁸ Homogeneity, given as a reaction which banishes the affective possibility of heterogeneity, is further defined as itself an affective reaction, and thus ultimately an "intense" vision, a partial, incomplete, reduction which is radically conditioned by the heterogeneity it reduces.⁹ Thus, the force which opposes violence is itself shown to be a form of violence.

That the two terms of each Bataillian opposition condition each other to the point of mutual contamination does not lessen the force of their opposition. Discontinuity may be constituted by continuity, but must comport itself in radical opposition to the latter, because of the presence of survival as a necessity. Homogeneity may be defined as "heterogeneity-reduced," and prohibition may ultimately be defined as a form of transgression; but these terms are violently opposed, and the axis of their opposition is the relation "utility," whose own foundation is the problematic of discontinuity and survival. Indeed, the specificity of Bataille's dialectic is its sacrifice of a term of synthesis, in favor of a space of tense contamination in which two modes of being invade each other, contaminate each other, compromise

each other, while paradoxically retaining the integrity of their opposition.

The space of this contamination is the actual locus of Bataillian "violence," and has a strict priority over the ostensible "violence" of the second term of each opposition (heterogeneity, continuity, transgression, etc.). The triumph of the initial term of violence over the term of closure or non-violence would be the synthesis Bataille will not accept. The refusal of such a synthesis will take, in his texts, the form of a series of terms which are invoked to designate a violent contamination. Within the early system "homogeneity/heterogeneity," this term was the model of "tension" or "intensity" which ultimately designated homogeneity. In the later context of discontinuity, several new terms will be derived for this purpose, chief among them the glissement, which describes a subjectivity trapped between two modes of being which constitute it simultaneously;¹⁰ the impossible, which designates an ipseity whose closure is both absolute and uncertain;¹¹ inachèvement and the effort d'autonomie, which also designate this problematic closure;¹² the mise en jeu, etc. Within the context of prohibition and transgression, a simultaneity of fear and desire as motivations of both these comportments will be introduced as an index of their mutual conditioning;¹³ the category "im-possibility" will reappear to function as the "condition of possibility" of an effective or accomplished transgression; dépense will be carefully defined as a mise en jeu without resolution or destruction,¹⁴ etc.

In Bataille's text, closure is always ineluctable, as is a violence which threatens and conditions closure. The intensity of

a problematic closure is human violence, for Bataille: the violence of an isolation from which there is no escape, but to which an imminent and inescapable destruction is always intimately present. In the absence of a possibility of resolution to this problematic closure, the generalized concept of isolation and its "other" will have the character of an exigency and a paradox, in Bataille's text. This exigency will be called "la communication." Its multiple forms include a discontinuous being which must escape its limits, and which cannot escape its limits; a subject who must deny the constraint of the interdit, but whose transgression cannot be other than a maintenance of prohibition, upon the model of a mise en jeu; an intersubjectivity which must abolish alterity, but which cannot function as other than a mutual impenetrability. The paradigm for these and many other forms of "communication," in Bataille's thought, may be perceived in a discontinuity which contains more than it can contain.

Dire La Communication

Transgression is given by Bataille as an activity upon the model of an exigency: a giving-in, a pre-voluntary form of dépense as mise en jeu. But it is also defined as a revelation or form of cognition. The knowledge that the interdit "is not imposed from outside," "nous apparaît dans l'angoisse, au moment où il joue encore, et où nous cédon's néanmoins à l'impulsion à laquelle il s'opposait" (E., p. 43). This awareness, to which all forms of cognition whose foundation and protection is the interdit itself would be blind ("science,"

"knowledge," the "profane world of things"), is an awareness of the fact of "communication" considered as experience. The problem of knowledge in Bataille's system is introduced by the question: "What may be said about the fact of communication, as it is apprehended in the act of transgression?" How may communication be thought within the context of a mise en jeu of the interdit? Or, as Maurice Blanchot writes:

Comment, d'une telle atteinte, la pensée, à supposer qu'elle s'y soit affirmée un instant, pourrait-elle jamais revenir et en ramener, sinon un savoir nouveau, du moins, à la distance d'un souvenir, ce qu'il faudrait pour se maintenir sous sa garde?¹⁵

Against the background of Bataille's categories, the problem posed by Blanchot is extremely complex. Since discontinuity is animated by continuity, and biologically constituted by (an intercellular and environmental) "communication," and since knowledge is initially defined as "a profane) non-communication, the question of knowledge becomes: How may communication's anti-communication communicate (itself)? The verbs "revenir," "ramener," and "garde" suggest an immediate escape-from and evacuation-of the violence of communication; and we know that such an evacuation will make communication impossible. It appears that a knowledge of communication will of necessity be a reification; that discontinuity's project of transitively speaking (thinking) its own inner experience of communication can only be related to that experience as a falsification, a profane knowledge "gained." The only sign of escape from this apparent aporia may be perceived in Blanchot's phrase, "à supposer qu'elle s'y soit affirmée un instant." Does thought affirm itself originally in the domain of

communication? Is thought, like discontinuity or the interdit, an affirmation immediately solidary with the term it opposes? Is knowledge a communication which opposes communication?

Non-Savoir as Imminence

Knowledge is always given by Bataille as subjectivity's inescapable proximity to the existent, a mediation as ineluctable as the instinct of an animal. Though the predicate of this mediation is "servility" in Bataille's text, the absence of an alternative to servility will always be stipulated by him. "De même que le sommet n'est à la fin que l'inaccessible, le déclin dès l'abord est l'inévitable" (S.N., p. 57). The structure which supplants such an alternative will be a conditioning articulation of the interdit and transgression, applied to knowledge. This articulation will have the name non-savoir:

J'ai vu au bout que l'idée de communication elle-même laisse nu, ne sachant rien. Quelle qu'elle soit, faute d'une révélation positive en moi présente à l'extrême, je ne peux lui donner ni raison d'être ni fin. Je demeure dans l'intolérable non-savoir. . . . (E.I., pp. 24-5)

A thinking subject intends the "idea of communication," within the context of a reification defined as the primacy of the interdit, according to the model of an intense, paradoxical failure of reification--non-savoir--whose ontological predicates are "nudity" and "intolerability." This impossible failure of an ineluctable reification is founded by Bataille's prior descriptions of ipseity as a problematic closure. The following paragraph directly relates this closure to non-savoir, by means of a complex, strategic pseudo-diachrony:

L'angoisse suppose le désir de communiquer, c'est-à-dire de me perdre, mais non la résolution entière: l'angoisse témoigne de ma peur de communiquer, de me perdre. L'angoisse est donnée dans le thème du savoir lui-même: ipse, par le savoir, je voudrais être tout, donc communiquer, me perdre, cependant demeurer ipse. Pour la communication, avant qu'elle ait lieu, se posent le sujet (moi, ipse) et l'objet (en partie indéfini, tant qu'il n'est pas entièrement saisi). Le sujet veut s'emparer de l'objet pour le posséder . . . mais il ne peut que se perdre: le non-sens de la volonté de savoir survient, non-sens de tout possible, faisant savoir à l'ipse qu'il va se perdre et le savoir avec lui. Tant que l'ipse persévère dans sa volonté de savoir et d'être ipse dure l'angoisse, mais si l'ipse s'abandonne et le savoir avec lui-même, s'il se donne au non-savoir dans cet abandon, le ravissement commence. Dans le ravissement, mon existence retrouve un sens, mais le sens se réfère aussitôt à l'ipse, devient mon ravissement, un ravissement que je ipse, possède, donnant satisfaction à ma volonté d'être tout. Dès que j'en reviens là cesse la communication, la perte de moi-même, j'ai cessé de m'abandonner, je reste là, mais avec un savoir nouveau.

Le mouvement recommence à partir de là. . . . (E.I., p. 67)

Through the extreme difficulty of the above paragraph, Bataille's concept of knowledge asserts itself, profoundly conditioned by the logic of discontinuity and continuity as communication.

(1) Anguish, the moment of coincidence of fear and desire, or fear conditioned and constituted by desire, characterized the moment of transgression. But it also characterized the moment of imposition of the interdit. Univocal as its function may be with regard to the sacred and profane worlds, the interdit is imposed in a manner which calls to the sacred world and has the status of an "accord" with the violence of the sacred. The interdit is imposed in order to be transgressed. It now becomes evident that the function of the knowing subject, under the aegis of the interdit, is conditioned by the same complexity. This subject, according to a formula repeatedly used by Bataille, "veut être tout"--"wants to be all"--wants to be the universe. But this desire is motivated by the discontinuous need to survive

in an integral form: to remain ipse, identity to self, integrity.

L'opposition incertaine de l'autonomie à la transcendance met l'être en position glissante: en même temps qu'il s'enferme dans l'autonomie, de ce fait même chaque être ipse veut devenir le tout de la transcendance, en premier lieu le tout de la composition dont il est partie. . . . (E.I., p. 101; my emphasis)

The "volonté d'autonomie" (E.I., p. 101) becomes "volonté d'être tout," since the limit case of autonomy is the absence of alterity. To be all is to leave nothing outside. But the position hides a logical glissement. To want to be all is to abolish the limits of the things in the world. And this abolition of exteriority is continuity: being without limits. To want to be all is to want to lose the limit of one's particularity, and at the same time to want to enclose all within the limit of one's particularity; to want to communicate utterly with the transcendence of All, but to do so by making of All the integral discontinuity of Self. The model according to which this primary objectality functions is that of anguish (fear-desire). Discontinuity fears the transcendence constitutive of objects (continuity) and wishes to engulf all objects with Self (discontinuity). But this wish to be transcendence implies loss of isolation (separation, discontinuity), hence a certain dissolution into continuity. To remain ipse is not commensurable with the desire to transcend isolation. But for the discontinuous being, the two desires cannot but coincide rigorously. Hence anguish is the originary relation of ipse to the object, and this relation immediately envisages discontinuity's limits.

La vie humaine se lie à la lucidité--qui n'est pas donnée du dehors, acquise dans des conditions contraires--lucidité faite de contestations d'elle-même sans relâche, à la fin se

dissolvant dans le rire (dans le non-savoir). La lucidité, la contestation, ne peuvent manquer d'atteindre à la conscience des limites--où les résultats vacillent, où l'être est la mise en question de soi-même. (C., p. 347)

Lucidity is constituted by anguish, as contestation of Self in the desire to be All. Its results must "vacillate," since its project is paradoxical. The act which objectifies is simultaneously an antiobjectification, a contestation of ipseity. Denis Hollier aptly speaks of this moment in the context of a word play on "penser" and "dépenser": "La pensée qui s'éveille s'éveille donc contre elle-même. . . . Par l'éveil, la pensée se rétracte: elle se dépense" ("Le Matérialisme dualiste de Georges Bataille," Tel Quel 25, p. 43). Human life, then, "links itself" with lucidity, in the context of its "effort d'autonomie." And lucidity "cannot fail" to become a consciousness of limits, since it was from the beginning such a consciousness: a dé-penser.

(2) "se dissolvant dans le rire (dans le non-savoir)": Knowledge leads to the limit, because knowledge as a willful comportment is motivated by a relation to the limit. Just as the interdit called for transgression, through an intimate accord hidden within its illusory opposition, knowledge calls to non-savoir as its violent complement, its hidden condition, its silent end. "Le non-sens de la volonté de savoir survient": It is not reason that motivates the desire to know--no more than it was reason which instituted the interdit. The desire to know is violent--is violence: the violence of discontinuity as glissement, as mise en jeu. It is an exigency conditioned by survival and by death. It leads, through its privileged illusion of objectivity and the possession of truth, inexorably to its limit. The experience

of this limit is non-savoir. As the rire, it is the dissolution of lucidity. It is the greater violence toward which lucidity's violence (contestation) leads, as dépense and transgression were the greater violence approached by discontinuity and the interdit. The rire conditions the project of knowledge itself. The project is its own potential dissolution: an inevitable dissolution which becomes imminent dissolution.

Angoisse gives way to ravissement, as savoir leads to non-savoir. The phrase "non-sens de la volonté de savoir," "non-sens de tout possible" introduces this quasi-temporal, logical progression from violence to greater violence. Knowledge leads, through a certain apprehension of the illusory nature of the "possible," to a violent awareness of the fact that dis-continuous man is the im-possible. The moment of non-savoir is equivalent to and solidary with the im-possible. The negative prefix of each term is the condition of the concept it modifies (contaminates). Non-savoir as the experience of limits is the condition for the dependent, temporary, illusory moment which is knowledge. The impossible is also the experience of limits ("qui ne peut éviter ses limites, et ne peut non plus s'y tenir"--C., p. 261), and is the condition for the illusion of the possible (utility, survival, accomplishment).

Anguish gives way to ravissement, having prepared it, called for it, as the interdit gives way to transgression in paradoxical solidarity with it. What is the temporality of this progression?

(3) "faisant savoir à l'ipse qu'il va se perdre et le savoir avec lui": The phrase "va se perdre" indicates a movement toward loss which

cannot be stopped, and a knowledge of the inexorability of that movement. This is the temporality of discontinuity: the temporality of the exigency as imminent violence, a violence which never arrives as pure destruction, but which forever threatens, in the form of the im-possible coincidence of destruction and limits. The last phrases of Bataille's demonstration, in their feigned temporality of simple succession, mime, through the optic of the im-possible, this perpetual imminence:

Si l'ipse s'abandonne et le savoir avec lui-même, s'il se donne au non-savoir dans cet abandon, le ravissement commence. Dans le ravissement, mon existence retrouve un sens, mais le sens se réfère aussitôt à l'ipse, devient mon ravissement. . . .

The im-possible is represented here by the verbs "s'abandonner" and "se donner." Not to be able to abandon self is the being of discontinuity. But this being is also the experience of the perpetual exigency of that impossible abandon. The meaning rediscovered in ravissement, which "aussitôt" immediately, or "always already"--refers itself to ipse--is the impossible: impossible limits, impossible destruction. "Aussitôt" is precisely a prolongation, a continuation, of "va se perdre": incessant imminence combined with incessant closure. "Dès que j'en reviens le cesse la communication, la perte de moi-même, j'ai cessé de m'abandonner. . . ." The return, the end of loss of self, the end of communication, is the end within the beginning of this movement of knowledge. The coincidence of the end and the beginning in a perpetual imminence is the impossible. Ravissement always "commence," always beings, is always beginning, or about to begin. Its beginning is always deferred by the immediacy of its

relation to ipse. The movement of this beginning may perhaps be described by a formula invoked by Michel Foucault (in "Préface à la transgression," Critique 195-6, 1963, pp. 754-5) for the description of the relation of transgression to the limit: a "rapport en vrille dont aucune effraction simple ne peut venir à bout." Or the "aussitôt" of ravissement's relation to ipse may parallel Foucault's "ligne qui . . . aussitôt se referme en une vague de peu de mémoire. . . ."

In both cases, a kind of imminence describes the impossible, which is non-savoir: what Philippe Sollers has aptly called "logique et agonie de la logique" ("De Grandes irrégularités de langage," Critique 195-6, p. 796). Non-savoir is the impossible. Ipse, as discontinuity, is the impossible. Savoir, as "volonté d'être tout," is the impossible. "Le mouvement recommence à partir de là. . . ." Knowledge as the impossible is "une immense architecture en démolition, en construction dans le même temps" (C., p. 279). It is a movement which begins, ends, and begins again, even as it begins.

Logos and "Inachèvement"

The contemporary student of Bataille confronts a critical tradition whose appearance followed Bataille's death. This tradition, rooted in an awareness of the misunderstandings which classified Bataille as a "mystic" during his lifetime, has declared with urgent sympathy the immediate relevance of Bataille's thought to contemporary philosophical issues. Simultaneously, it has attributed to his categories a radical, violently subversive opposition to the categories

of a "traditional" discourse. Such an attribution, while proximate to the exuberance of Bataille's texts (often to the extent of a disturbing mimicry of the philosopher's own procedures), creates serious difficulties in interpretation. One such difficulty is the imposition of a duality "tradition/subversion" which is governed by a non-problematized reading of the opposition "interdit/transgression." According to this reading, the term "tradition" is understood with a univocity not characteristic of "prohibition" in Bataille's text. The term "subversion" is granted an efficacy never accorded to "transgression" by Bataille. Within this context, a historical epistemology whose limits were clearly given as ineluctable by Bataille has been called "la conscience installée, apprise, la tranquillité lourde où l'homme occidental a choisi de se retirer" (P. Sollers, "Le Toit," L'Ecriture et l'expérience des limites, Seuil, 1968, p. 106). Elsewhere, it has been mistakenly said of a "communication" correctly perceived as the exigency of a "sortie hors de soi," that "elle s'accomplit sur fond de destruction et de mort," that it is an "accès au sommet par-delà toute parole" whose condition of possibility is a subject who would "rejeter tout souci de l'avenir . . . en se vouant à la dépense pure" (Jean-Michel Rey, "Le Mise en jeu," L'Arc 32, 1967, p. 21). Elsewhere still, it has been said that against the background of classical oppositions which were never "de véritables oppositions, c'est-à-dire des oppositions totales et radicales," "Bataille pense l'opposition absolue"; that this "radicalization" of the "instrument de la métaphysique" renders it "un instrument de subversion, de destruction du discours

traditionnel" (Rodolphe Gasché, "L'Avorton de la pensée," L'Arc 44, 1971, p. 25). The concept "dépense," read by the same author as a "perte inconditionnelle," is termed "le sacrifice du sens propre de l'échange restreint, en un mot la dilapidation du propre, de la propriété et de la propriété" (p. 11). These statements, among others, refer to a thinker for whom "la mise en question demeure le fait de l'être isolé" (C., p. 436); for whom dépense "ne tue pas mais souille" (S.N., p. 46); for whom "le sacrifice est fait d'un mélange d'angoisse et de frénésie" (P.M., p. 106); for whom "le sacrificateur n'est divin qu'avec réticences" (P.M., p. 105); for whom "la nature humaine ne peut comme telle rejeter le souci de l'avenir" (S.N., p. 54). The notion of a defiant, efficacious subversion, applied to Bataille's theoretical practice, may not be coherently posited within the context of his multiple demonstrations that "le déclin dès l'abord est l'inévitable" (S.N., p. 57), that "notre seul possible est le travail" (C., p. 241). A perception of "la communication" as exigency is not possible within the terms of a logic of accomplishment or efficacy. Such a logic cannot perceive the structure "inachèvement" which renders the logos itself an architecture whose demolition is its very construction; a transgression defined as a failure to destroy ipseity; a non-savoir repeatedly defined as a problematic reification. Such a logic, above all, cannot perceive the governing function of the mise en jeu which informs the following, fundamental Bataillan concept of philosophy in its historicity:

Seule la philosophie revêt une étrange dignité du fait qu'elle assume la mise en question infinie. Ce ne sont pas des résultats qui lui valent une prestige discutable, mais

seulement qu'elle réponde à l'aspiration de l'homme
demandant la mise en question de tout ce qui est. . . .
Sa valeur tout entière est dans l'absence de repos qu'elle
entretient. (C., pp. 374-5)

Rire

Jacques Derrida, who sees traditional philosophy as a set of concepts whose historical primacy as a mode of thought allows no radical contemporary "escape," is a uniquely equipped reader of Bataille. His concept of "deconstruction" of Western "metaphysics" through a careful and interminable displacement of concepts manifests, in general, a deliberate indifference to any telos of revolutionary escape from classical "constraints." For Derrida, philosophy is its own deconstruction, and its exemplary tension results from its continual solicitation of its own limits. This rigorously sustained point of view forms the background of his brilliant essay on Bataille, in L'Ecriture et la différence (Seuil, 1967, pp. 369-408). Nevertheless, there are problems in Derrida's reading of Bataille--problems which refer us once again to the violent structure of conditioning we have been discussing in Bataille's thought.

"De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: Un hégélianisme sans réserve" is an analysis of Bataille's attitude toward Hegel, and concomitantly a discussion of the relation of Bataille's thought to traditional philosophy. Developing a painstaking articulation of Hegelian "mastery" and Bataillian "souveraineté," Derrida describes what he sees as the effect of Bataille's central categories on the classical philosophical discourse. It is this sector of his essay that interests us here.

We have seen above (C., p. 347) that, for Bataille, thought leads inevitably to non-savoir, which may take the form of a certain burst of laughter: "lucidité faite de contestations d'elle-même sans relâche, à la fin se dissolvant dans le rire (dans le non-savoir)." This laughter represents the moment of the impossible and of communication, as we have seen. "Essentiellement, ce dont le rire procède est la communication" (C., p. 390). The structure of this laughter is that of transgression, the interior experience, or communication, in the human sense: the anguish of discontinuity at the extreme of the possible, faced with the limit, and aware that this situation is the impossible. Now, for Derrida, the rire is an interruption of the philosophical discourse. It originates with Bataille as reader of that discourse. The rire is the modality of Bataille's reading of philosophy. It is the functioning of his concepts as an interruption of philosophy's repression. In the case of Hegel, Bataille's rire appears when the Master's embrace of death is adequated with a philosophical need to continue living: "Éclat de rire de Bataille. Par une ruse de la vie, c'est-à-dire de la raison, la vie est donc restée en vie" (p. 376). The rire interrupts the conservation, profane motivation of thought. But what is laughable? For Derrida's Bataille,

Ce qui est risible, c'est la soumission à l'évidence du sens, à la force de cet impératif: qu'il y ait du sens, que rien ne soit définitivement perdu par la mort, que celle-ci reçoive la signification encore de "négativité abstraite," que le travail soit toujours possible qui, à différer la jouissance, confère sens, sérieux et vérité à la mise en jeu. Cette soumission est l'essence et l'élément de la philosophie. . . . (p. 377)

We have seen the imperative of this submission before: It is the

imperative of survival, the necessity which founds the profane world. However, we have also seen that this imperative takes its energy from, and is utterly conditioned by, the very desire which is its supposed opposite: continuity, the desire for a questioning with no answer, desire for violent loss. This is "la force de cet impératif." Derrida, who is thinking in terms of an opposition between mastery and sovereignty, does not bring into play this desire at the heart of knowledge's "submission"; but at the same time, in the context of servility, his terminology refers to it, in the phrase, "confère sens, sérieux et vérité à la mise en jeu." A certain awareness of the mise en jeu, of the infinite contestation which is its own constitution, rests at the heart of knowledge. The mise en jeu (and we note here the problematic passive-active transitivity of anguish) precedes, logically, the conferring of meaning. What Derrida describes in the context of submission is this precedence of the mise en jeu, a precedence which "aussitôt"--immediately or "always already"--conditions and problematizes the transitivity of the verb "confer." Our reading of Bataille has shown us that this transitivity is already violent, already conditioned by desire, already a mise en jeu even as it seems to be the opposite. The conferring of meaning and seriousness is already the affirmation of contestation. (Derrida explicitly maintains this point of view in the context of his declaration that "Bataille a . . . pris Hegel au sérieux, et le savoir absolu" (p. 371). Bataille's rire, even in its derision, takes its force from the taking-seriously of what it solicits. We are here questioning the absence of this problematic on the side of Hegelian mastery.) This structure enables us to see the difficulty

of Derrida's last sentence, "Cette soumission est l'essence et l'élément de la philosophie . . . ," in relation to Bataille's insistence that "elle répond à l'aspiration de l'homme demandant la mise en question de tout ce qui est," and that "sa valeur tout entière est dans l'absence de repos qu'elle entrent" (C., pp. 374-5). In Bataille's eyes, the rire would not be an interruption of the servility of knowledge, but rather an anguish at the heart of that servility, an anguish which immediately compromises the very term of servility. Again, in the temporality of discontinuity, the rire would not supervene, but would condition submission from the beginning. Philosophy would be, not only the risible, but the rire itself. "Rire est penser" (E.I., p. 213). "C'est dans l'échec qu'est l'interrogation que nous rions" (S.N., p. 63). Can this mutual conditioning be suspended momentarily, for the sake of argument, on the grounds that the opposition is more pertinent than the solidarity of the terms? Bataille's system does not allow us to think so, and neither do the resonances of Derrida's terms. To "la force de cet impératif" may be justly added another phrase: "que le travail soit toujours possible qui, à différer la jouissance, confère sens. . . ." The reader of this formula can hardly fail to be reminded of transgression, which "maintient l'interdit pour en jouir," nor can he fail to perceive the preparation of transgression inherent in work's deferring of pleasure--in a word, the transgression inherent in work.

This problematic of conditioning, which erodes the concept of souveraineté as an opposition to the (Hegelian) discourse of reason, causes a hesitation in Derrida's positing of the rire as interruption;

a hesitation which ends in an open contradiction, as a comparison of the two following quotations demonstrates:

Loin d'interrompre la dialectique, l'histoire et le mouvement du sens, la souveraineté donne à l'économie de la raison son élément, son milieu, ses bordures illimitantes de non-sens. (382)

Sacrifiant le sens, la souveraineté fait sombrer la possibilité du discours: non simplement par une interruption, une césure ou une blessure à l'intérieur du discours (une négativité abstraite), mais, à travers une telle ouverture, par une interruption découvrant soudain la limite du discours et l'au-delà du savoir absolu. (383, my emphasis)

The correctness of Derrida's first sentence is exactly the condition of the wrongness of the second. Sovereignty (laughter, transgression, communication: the impossible) does not interrupt the dialectic; in "giving it its element," sovereignty silently conditions and takes part in the constitution of the dialectic. Sovereignty is far more than its difference with regard to mastery: It is an exigency so pervasive that, beyond the pseudo-opposition of its status as "not-mastery," it is part of mastery. Derrida's radical separation of the two concepts causes the "hyperbole" of the second sentence, an exaggeration of the power and efficacy of sovereignty which in turn causes an almost symmetrical misuse of every term involved: (1) Sovereignty does not sacrifice meaning, but constitutes it in its violence, as the desire inherent in savoir; (2) Sovereignty does not destroy the possibility of the discourse of reason: It contributes integrally to that very possibility, which is at the same time violence, the impossible of reason; (3) Sovereignty is not an interruption, or an eruption of the discovery of the limit, but the constant, silent awareness of the limit which constitutes discourse--an awareness which occupies the movement of reason itself.

This contradictory problematic of interruption is accompanied, throughout Derrida's essay, by a contradictory hesitation with regard to the problem of loss, sacrifice, or consumation of meaning. Here, as elsewhere in the text of contemporary Bataille studies, the problem concerns the violent efficacy of Bataille's thought, considered as a subversive strategy. Derrida writes, at one point:

La souveraineté doit donc sacrifier encore la maîtrise, la présentation du sens de la mort. Perdu pour le discours, le sens est alors absolument détruit et consumé. (383)

And several pages later:

La souveraineté est l'impossible, elle n'est donc pas, elle est, Bataille écrit le mot en italique, "cette perte." L'écriture de souveraineté met le discours en rapport avec le non-discours absolu. Comme l'économie générale, elle n'est pas la perte du sens, mais, nous venons de le lire, "rapport à la perte du sens." (397)

Is sovereignty the sacrifice of meaning as absolute destruction, or is it the impossible, a certain relation to the (impossible or imminent) destruction of meaning? Jacques Derrida hesitates between the two alternatives, but Bataille's text makes clear that only the second is an option. The sacrifice of meaning is precisely the experience of the impossibility of the destruction of meaning, exactly as the sacrifice of a human being, for the sacrificer is the experience of the impossibility of destroying ipseity. Derrida's second sentence resolves the difficulty of his first sentence. Sovereignty is precisely a perpetual relation to the loss of meaning--a loss which never occurs--within the project of conferring meaning itself--a project which contains, and is in a sense aware of, that relation. The relation of knowledge to its own greatest danger--loss of meaning--within knowledge

itself--is the impossible. Derrida has understood the importance of the impossible as a conditioning factor in Bataille's thought, but he has not appreciated the immense extent of the impossible's influence on all the major moments of Bataille's demonstrations. Derrida sees that the impossible conditions sovereignty, but he does not appear to realize that it conditions knowledge as well. It may be that this prior condition escapes him because he is committed to the idea of an adversary relation between Bataille and "traditional" thought, in which Bataille's position is that of the subverter of a repressive structure. How could such a formulation perceive knowledge itself as the impossible?

Concomitant to this problem is another contradiction. Derrida notes that "on pourrait même abstraire, dans le texte de Bataille, toute une zone par laquelle la souveraineté reste prise dans une philosophie classique du sujet et surtout dans ce volontarisme dont Heidegger a montré qu'il se confondait encore, chez Hegel et chez Nietzsche, avec l'essence de la métaphysique" (391). But Derrida's own vision of the rire and of souveraineté as subversions requires him to read Bataille precisely on this level he claims to reject, as the following sentence shows: "La maîtrise devient souveraine . . . lorsqu'elle cesse de redouter l'échec et se perd comme la victime absolue de son sacrifice" (389). The radical voluntarism of this formula is exactly the opposite of sovereignty as we have seen it in Bataille's text. The specificity of the sacrifice is, firstly, that the subject does not stop fearing failure ("le sacrifice est fait d'un mélange d'angoisse et de frénésie"--P.M., p. 106), and, secondly, that the sacrificer does not, cannot, lose

himself as the victim of the sacrifice. The entire weight of the sacrifice and of sovereignty consists in their status as pre-voluntary conditions, problematizations of the concept of will.

Glissement

The voluntarism of a derisive subversion of tradition's submission is repeated by a final difficulty in Derrida's text. This difficulty centers on his reading of the glissement in Bataille, and concerns language, one of the major zones of "communication" in Bataille's system. The glissement, initially a description of dis-continuity itself (in conjunction with such terms as inachèvement, impossible, effort d'autonomie), and in general the sign for the concept "problematic closure" in Bataille's text, is read by Derrida as the context of a strategic subversion of the integrity of a "vieille langue":

Comme il s'agit, nous l'avons vu, d'un certain glissement, ce qu'il faut bien trouver, c'est, non moins que le mot, le point, le lieu dans un tracé où un mot puisé dans la vieille langue, se mettra, d'être mis là et de recevoir telle motion, à glisser et à faire glisser tout le discours. Il faudra imprimer au langage un certain tour stratégique qui, d'un mouvement violent et glissant, furtif, en infléchisse le vieux corps pour en rapporter la syntaxe et le lexique au silence majeur. (387)

The strategic placing of words allows the glissement to follow its own violent course toward the destruction of concepts and meaning:

Cette écriture . . . se plie à enchaîner les concepts classiques en ce qu'ils ont d'inévitable, . . . de telle sorte qu'ils obéissent en apparence, par un certain tour, à leur loi habituelle, mais en se rapportant en un certain point au moment de la souveraineté, à la perte absolue de leur sens, à la dépense sans réserve, à ce qu'on ne peut même plus appeler négativité ou perte du sens que sur leur face philosophique;

un non-sens, donc, qui est au-delà du sens absolu, au-delà de la clôture ou de l'horizon du savoir absolu. Emportés dans ce glissement calculé, les concepts deviennent des non-concepts, ils sont impensables. . . . (393)

And ultimately, the "destruction du discours" is "une substitution sans fin et sans fond dont la seule règle est l'affirmation souveraine du jeu hors-sens," "une sorte de potlatch des signes, brûlant, consumant, gaspillant les mots dans l'affirmation gaie de la mort: un sacrifice et un défi" (405).

The model of the "glissement calculé," robbing concepts of their meaning, destroying by incessant substitution the discourse itself, is significantly resumed by an apparently casual simile which is in reality essential: "une sorte de potlatch des signes." The voluntarism of Derrida's formulation does indeed rejoin that of potlatch, but in a way which endangers his entire argument. For the specificity of potlatch in Bataille's system is its subordination of destruction (of goods, and even of human beings) to an acquisition of societal rank. A chief who destroys goods in the name of another is defying his rival in order to achieve an advantage over him. "Ce qui dans la dilapidation est approprié est le prestige qu'elle donne au dilapidateur (individu ou groupe), qui est acquis par lui comme un bien et qui détermine son rang" (P.M., p. 118). Potlatch is a ritual which, while closely similar to the violence of the sacrifice, is nevertheless fundamentally compromised by its desire for gain--what Bataille calls its "mobilization of the useless." This compromise is the result of the voluntarism of potlatch. It superimposes a calculation on what cannot be calculated: the glissement which constitutes the violence

of the sacrifice. Derrida's words are well chosen: "un sacrifice et un défi."

Derrida, while not explicitly suggesting that Bataille "fait glisser les mots," nevertheless superimposes, in his concept of an "écriture de souveraineté," the mastery of the subject over the uncertainty of language, in formulas like "imprimer au langage," "tour stratégique," and "glissement calculé." This last, in the system of Bataille's categories, is not an option. The glissement is very precisely that which cannot be calculated. It is the end of calculation, the violence of calculation's impossibility. And this points up the hidden truth of Derrida's argument, a truth so often explicitly stated in Derrida's work, but strangely latent in his reading of Bataille. The fact that a word "puisé dans la vieille langue" "se met à glisser," "à faire glisser tout le discours," is, ultimately, what already happens in the discourse of reason. The fact that the classical concepts, while appearing to function predictably, relate themselves "en un certain point au moment de la souveraineté, à la perte absolue de leur sens," is, according to the temporal model of savoir and non-savoir, the very nature of the discourse of reason itself. The "destruction du discours" in the form, among others, of "une substitution sans fin et sans fond," is the discourse. The discourse is its own interminably imminent destruction, as we have seen Bataille insist. The glissement of a mot glissant is the movement of meaning itself.

Hidden within a paragraph of Derrida's introduction to his reading of Bataille is an exemplary, Bataillian vision of philosophy itself:

L'impossible médité par Bataille aura toujours cette forme:
comment, après avoir épuisé le discours de la philosophie,

inscrire dans le lexique et la syntaxe d'une langue, la nôtre, qui fut aussi celle de la philosophie, ce qui excède néanmoins les oppositions de concepts dominées par cette logique commune? Nécessaire et impossible, cet excès devait plier le discours en une étrange contorsion. (371)

How may philosophy, after having "always already" exhausted the resources of its questions in its incessant movement toward the closure of utility (the profane world), inscribe (to control again) the force of those contestations in its profane language? How may communication, after having exhausted its force in the struggle to silence itself, resuscitate that force in order to silence it again? The movement of this excess within a continual closure is philosophy itself, and the strangely contorted discourse Derrida refers to is the logos. "Necessary and impossible": These words describe, for Bataille, the imperative of reason itself. The logos is the impossible.

Communication

An understanding of the violence of thought in its historicity, combined with a strategic, highly sympathetic overestimation of the violent efficacy of Bataille's thought, falsifies in Jacques Derrida's essay the central tension in Bataille's system. The terms of Bataille's oppositions condition each other so intimately that pure servility, and pure destruction, are radically compromised. Equally compromised is the will of the thinking subject, since the conditions of knowledge and non-savoir are pre-voluntary. The glissement knows no calculation; it captivates: "D'autant que ce glissement n'était pas saisissable, il était captivant; il l'était au dernier degré de la tension" (E.I., p. 146). It is not a voluntary subversion that interests Bataille. It

is rather the dissolution of will in a ubiquitous, imminent subversion at the tense center of thought itself. The form of this perpetual imminence, too often misunderstood by Bataille's readers, is a logos conceived as communication:

Ce qu'on ne voit pas d'habitude en parlant: que le discours, même niant sa propre valeur, ne suppose pas seulement qui le tient mais qui l'écoute. . . . Je ne trouve en moi-même rien, qui plus que moi-même, ne soit propriété de mon semblable. Et ce mouvement de ma pensée qui me fuit, non seulement, je ne puis l'éviter, mais il n'est pas d'instant si secret qu'il ne m'anime. Ainsi je parle, tout en moi se donne à d'autres. (E.I., p. 149)

"Ma pensée qui me fuit"--my thought which flees me--and "tout en moi se donne à d'autres"--these are the essential characteristics of the logos for Bataille. Passivity at the seat of will, loss in the heart of isolation, paradoxical generosity beyond survival.

What is the thinker's exigency, finally, for Bataille himself? We could agree with Jacques Derrida's formulation of the impossible as a project of inscription of excess within a philosophical language, as long as we interpreted that formulation in Bataillian terms, for philosophy itself. But we cannot agree with its voluntarism, if it applies to Bataille. For Bataille's ultimate stance before the dilemma of thought is not a project, but an anguished, entirely ambiguous question:

Laisserai-je ma pensée lentement--sournisement, et trichant le moins que je puis--se confondre avec le silence? (C., p. 242)

"Sournisement, et trichant le moins que je puis"--the thinker's exigency is a loss beyond calculation, situated in the heart of calculation itself. If the logos is an edifice whose demolition is its very

architecture, the communication of a subject whose dissolution is the condition of his very integrity, then we may prefer to Derrida's logic of inscription this formula by Michel Foucault:

Serait-il d'un grand secours de dire . . . qu'il faudrait trouver pour le transgressif un langage qui serait ce que la dialectique a été pour la contradiction? Il vaut mieux sans doute essayer de parler de cette expérience et de la faire parler au creux même de la défaillance de son langage, là où précisément les mots lui manquent, où le sujet qui parle vient à s'évanouir. . . . ("Préface . . . ," p. 759)

But our preference for Foucault's formula is predicated on an underlining of the verbs "essayer" and "faire parler," with their ultimate imperative movement; and on an understanding that the vanishing subject speaks as he vanishes, in an unending imminence which is that of Bataille's question.*

*The attempt to delimit a critical tradition or tendency, of recent birth and of complex proportions, requires a concomitant attempt to take a distance from the procedures of that tendency. Such an exigency is integral to the project of the above study, and may be perceived in the outward gravity of its discursive procedures. The author has chosen to avoid, in her argument, a certain exuberance characteristic of many Bataille studies. She has done so in accordance with the requirements of her questions. These questions point to a sector of the Bataillan text which, in her opinion, has remained opaque to a contemporary critical tendency. The gravity of their elaboration, rooted in a concern for intelligibility, is also intended as the movement of an exuberance of a different kind.

Notes

¹Le Coupable (Gallimard, 1944), p. 241. References to this book, as well as references to L'Expérience intérieure (1943), Sur Nietzsche (1945), and "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (1933-4), will follow the pagination of Volumes I, V, and VI of Bataille's Oeuvres complètes (Gallimard, 1969-73). The following abbreviations will be used: C. (Le Coupable); E.I. (L'Expérience intérieure); S.N. (Sur Nietzsche); E. (L'Erotisme, 10/18, 1970); P.M. (La Part maudite, Minuit "Points," 1967); L.M. (La Littérature et le mal, Gallimard "Idées," 1972).

²E., p. 47; L.M., p. 240.

³"La Structure psychologique. . .," I, pp. 343-4.

⁴P.M., p. 62.

⁵L.M., p. 240; E., p. 34.

⁶P.M., p. 62.

⁷E., p. 71; E., p. 76.

⁸E., p. 71.

⁹"La Structure psychologique. . .," I, p. 359.

¹⁰E.I., p. 111.

¹¹C., pp. 241, 261.

¹²C., pp. 263, 266, 376.

¹³E., pp. 20, 45-6, 51, 75-6; S.N., p. 54; P.M., pp. 105-6, etc.

¹⁴P.M., p. 76; E., p. 23, etc.

¹⁵"L'Expérience-limite," NRF 118 (Aout 1962), p. 591.

CHAPTER IV

PROXIMITY AND THE PAROLE

Maurice Blanchot has often drawn attention to the intrication of his own theoretical practice with that of Georges Bataille. The multiple effects of this articulation are to be found in nearly all the fictional and discursive texts of both writers. Many of their concepts invite comparison, and in some cases a single term has a fundamental and relatively similar value for both thinkers ("communication," "expérience," "exigence," "impossibilité"). The proximity of the Bataillian questions to Blanchot's most basic concerns is made manifest by the position accorded Bataille in the architecture of L'Entretien infini.¹ Two brilliant meditations on Bataille, "L'Affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative" and "Le Jeu de la pensée," are strategically placed at the center of Blanchot's book. The central division of the work, as well as its own central section, bear the original title of the first of these essays: "L'Expérience-limite." Such a concentration of attention upon Bataille points to an homage and a sense of the importance of his questions in their encounter with those of Blanchot. It indicates at the same time the resonances of Blanchot's readings of Bataille throughout L'Entretien infini--resonances which repeat those terms designating the approach to Bataille ("parole plurielle," "entretien," "expérience," etc.). As "Le Jeu de la pensée"

implies, the concept of an "entretien" with Georges Bataille is central to Blanchot's own sense of L'Entretien infini.

The purpose of this chapter will be to examine one field of this conceptual encounter in the context of Blanchot's own reading of Bataille: the field of intersubjectivity. To this end, the approach in Bataille's text to the question of literary communication, with its implicit development of a conceptualization of intersubjectivity, will be described against the background of Bataille's entire system. An attempt will then be made to interpret Blanchot's statements about Bataille, from the perspective of this generalized notion of intersubjectivity.

Evil and the Exigency of the Text

Bataille's system is organized by a series of problematic terms whose interplay has an unusually marked influence upon their individual definitions. These terms are derived, posited, given strategic and incomplete functions and values, and finally injected into a discursive freeplay which alone determines their ultimate reference or meaning. Thus, it is rarely possible to interpret a key Bataillian concept on the basis of its explicit discursive definition. Rather, interpretation must concentrate upon a textual inscription of theoretical terms whose meaning is suspended in the space of their proximity, their articulation, their implicit effect upon each other. More openly than most philosophers, Bataille remains silent at a certain point in his determination of specific terms. To an unusual extent, he allows textual inscription to be the fundamental and ultimate axis of his discursive

practice. A communication among the terms themselves is thus the process of their definition. The only movement which may be said to govern this configuration is that of attraction by which concepts are brought into increasing proximity. The momentum of this increasing proximity brings about an ever-increasing but ever-incomplete contamination of terms by one another--a compromise of the apparent transitivity of a given term by the proximity of another. In this context, the many explicit dualities which structure Bataille's discourse may appear to function dialectically, but in fact they do not. The impossibility of synthesis described by these dualities is the result of their refusal to function as dialectical opposites. The transitivity of opposition is supplanted in Bataille by the endlessly repeated suspension of a movement of contamination.

Such a movement of contamination characterizes the inscription of two terms which occupy a central position in Bataille's later texts: "la littérature" and "le mal." The intense and difficult interplay of these terms against the background of the many Bataillian concepts which they complement introduces creative writing and the literary text as a major zone of Bataille's system.

Two fundamental propositions, elaborated for the most part in the years after the publication of his Somme athéologique, define Bataille's initial concept of literature. Firstly, the basic notion "transgression," considered as the institutionalized violation of an ineluctable law--with the many complex conditions implied by such a "mise en jeu"--is privileged by Bataille in a distant past or in a context foreign to Western modernity. In his eyes, the history of

Christianity in its solidarity with capitalism represents a progressive movement of institutionalized values in the direction of utility, work, and a "primat de l'avenir." These values represent for Bataille a "profane" world of activity which is not interrupted in Western society, by a sacrificial or in other way transgressive behavior. Instead, the exigency toward transgression which had a legitimate place in other societies is specifically condemned in the culture of Christianity and capitalism.² This condemnation of transgression is, for Bataille, a banishing of the sacred from the world of religion or a profanation for the citizen of the Christian society is an unprecedented solitude. No longer may he share with his community a ritualized form of dépense, for it is ultimately dépense itself which is outlawed by the advent and influence of Calvin. Since prohibition and transgression are defined by Bataille as complements, equal and equally ineluctable moments of human comportment, the solitude of the Christian becomes absolute. In this context, the exigency of transgression will take a new form: "le mal." "Le Mal n'est pas la transgression, c'est la transgression condamnée. Le Mal est exactement le péché" (E., p. 140). Evil, in its initial and most systematic definition in Bataille's text, is a transgression attempted in solitude and in silence, without the sanction of a common language or ritual. The exaggeration of this condemnation, in the context of the strangely profaned Christian sacraments and the capitalist world, is characteristically privileged by Bataille. The aggravated violence of Evil, whose spasmodic assault on limits is yet more constrained and less efficacious than that of the ancient sacrifice, is a contamination of the notion of "possible" transgression, and as such is admired by Bataille.

The second proposition which prepares an introduction of literature in Bataille's text is a concept of language as an institutionalized and essentially profane code. By virtue of its conventional definitions, language is subordinate to the logic of utility which regulates the "profane" world. Language is a code which establishes a code: a signification which is implicitly a prescription and a proscription. Language for Bataille is the form par excellence of the interdit. It is the tool of a profane world of activity: "Nous parlons de diverses façons pour convaincre et chercher l'accord. Nous voulons établir d'humbles vérités qui coordonnent à celles de nos semblables nos attitudes et notre activité" (L.M., p. 236). Essentially intricated with an institutionalized condemnation which itself is the hyperbole of a perennial horror of transgression, language is a code whose telos is interdiction: the silencing of violence.

Celui qui parle est toujours civilisé. Ou plus précisément, le langage étant, par définition, l'expression de l'homme civilisé, la violence est silencieuse. Cette partialité du langage a beaucoup de conséquences: [. . .] Civilisation et langage se constituèrent comme si la violence était extérieure, étrangère non seulement à la civilisation mais à l'homme lui-même (l'homme étant la même chose que le langage). . . . Si l'on veut sortir le langage de l'impasse où cette difficulté le fait entrer, il est donc nécessaire de dire que la violence, étant le fait de l'humanité entière, est en principe demeurée sans voix, qu'ainsi l'humanité entièrement par omission et que le langage même est fondé sur ce mensonge. (E., p. 206)

Language is the modality of a counter-communication which controls the realm of communication: prohibition. Violence, a term designating the entire context of transgression considered as an exigency which is integral to the definition of humanity itself, is hidden or silenced by language. Bataille's sense of the exigency in the modern world is the imperative of giving a voice to violence.

The status of this imperative is to be defined by Bataille in characteristically hyperbolic terms which mask a developing problematization. The aggressive agency which is to restore a voice to silent violence will be "la littérature." This agency, posited in voluntaristic terms, will be the heir to the sacrifice: "La littérature se situe en fait à la suite des religions, dont elle est l'héritière. Le sacrifice est un roman, c'est un conte, illustré de manière sanglante" (E., p. 97). Literature's appearance in a profane modernity is described in the terms of irresponsibility and power: "Seule la littérature pouvait mettre à nu le jeu de la transgression de la loi--sans laquelle la loi n'aurait pas de fin--indépendamment d'un order à créer. . . . La littérature est même, comme la transgression de la loi morale, un danger. Etant inorganique, elle est irresponsable. Rien ne repose sur elle. Elle peut tout dire" (L.M., pp. 25-6).

Literature is the heir to the sacrifice. Evil, in a world which specifically condemns transgression, is also the heir to the sacrifice. The proximity of these concepts, whose compatibility has not been defined, but simply declared by Bataille, is the field of the meditation entitled La Littérature et le mal. "La littérature est l'essentiel, ou n'est rien. Le Mal--une forme aiguë du Mal--dont elle est l'expression, a pour nous, je le crois, la valeur souveraine" (L.M., p. 8). The sovereignty of literature is to be its irresponsible, efficacious transitivity--its expression of that which is powerless, silent, hidden.

Failure: The Text as Exigency

The theoretical act which privileges literature as subversion is homologous to the literary act it describes. It intends to discover in its aggressivity a pertinence which would exceed a traditional, profane configuration of pertinence. Miming precisely a traditional linguistic activity, it will destroy the repressiveness of this activity. However, it is precisely this formulation of linguistic subversion that Bataille has shown to be impossible. The self-contradiction which inaugurates the study of literature and Evil is troubling to Bataille's reader. The axis of this self-contradiction is clearly the notion of an expression which would share the aggressive transivity of its opposite: a profane language. The solidarity of transitive expression and interdiction, of aggression and prohibition, is clearly established by Bataille's categories, and will not admit the notion of a literature which "can say anything."

The foundation of the profane world is power. Prohibition is a definition of the real in terms of power. Any attempt to extricate literature or Evil from such a context must take the form of a problematization of the notion of power itself. This is the movement by which Bataille's theory of literature places in question its own hyperbolic beginnings. Its axis is the application to literature of a specialized, problematic predicate which is not an end or answer in itself, but rather the exigency of another question: the question of communication. This predicate is failure.

For each writer he considers, Bataille will develop a personalized concept of le mal, considered as the exigency of transgression. This

exigency will confront accepted moral values, on one hand, and the problem of textual inscription on the other. The creative writer will assault a moral constraint through a problematic inscription of excess in his text. A privileged failure will be the predicate of both the creative comportment and the textual expression.

Firstly, textual inscription of a violence which would exceed the reifying transitivity of a profane language will be described as a failure, on the ground that reification--considered as a closure whose ultimate predicates are yet to be defined--is an ineluctable result of inscription or expression. On Baudelaire, Bataille will write: "Il est vrai que l'effort est vain, que les poèmes où ce mouvement se pétrifie . . . ont fait du vice, de la haine et de la liberté infinies, les formes dociles, tranquilles, immuables que nous savons" (L.M., p. 53). The expression of excess--the attempt to seize what Bataille calls a "dessaisissement" (L.M., p. 50)--is a reduction of excess. The movement of inscription is always a domestication or recuperation--if excess may be said to be foreign to inscription itself, considered as a movement of exigency. But this is precisely the question Bataille is approaching.

Secondly, the comportment which seeks to destroy the constraints of the linguistic code by inscribing violence within it is seen to be trapped in a voluntaristic context which itself reduces violence. Bataille says of Sade: "Nous prenons à la fin conscience d'une difficulté dernière. La violence exprimée par Sade avait changé la violence en ce qu'elle n'est pas, dont elle est même nécessairement l'opposé: en une volonté réfléchie, rationalisée, de violence"

(E., pp. 211-12). The will to inscribe violence in the text is a voluntaristic detour in the activity of the writer which is irreducible and which compromises radically any prospect of a successful subversion. The text, and with it the existential process of its creation, is the limit of the duality "obstacle/subversion." To the extent that this duality exhausts the notion of the exigency of writing, the text must always be a failure. It attempts to codify that which escapes the code. It fails because it codifies; but most importantly, it fails because it attempts. It fails to the extent that the sole dimension of its movement is the context of power.

The value of sovereignty accorded to the literary text becomes, for Bataille, the paradoxical value of powerlessness and of a desire which knows no accomplishment. He says of Blake:

Parler d'Enitharmon ne révèle pas la vérité d'Enitharmon, c'est même avouer l'absence d'Enitharmon dans ce monde où vainement l'appelle la poésie. Le paradoxe de Blake est d'avoir ramené l'essence de la religion à celle de la poésie, mais d'avoir en même temps révélé, par impuissance, qu'en elle-même la poésie ne peut à la fois être libre et avoir la valeur souveraine. [. . .] Elle est souveraine sans doute, mais comme le désir, non comme la possession de l'objet. (L.M., pp. 98-9)

Desire, here as elsewhere in Bataille's critical texts, is privileged as the movement of an exigency whose being is to attempt the impossible and to fail. More specifically, desire is the modality of an exigency whose proper domain is not that of decision and failure, but rather a space for which the notion of power is no longer determining. This space, and with it the writer, is designated by what may be the most fundamental of all Bataillian terms: l'impossible.

From the concept of a literature which "can say anything," Bataille displaces his predications and conditions in the direction

of a literature which always must express evil, and is never able to do so. This literature is no longer the accomplishment of an expression, but rather the exigency of a text. Failing to express, it communicates. Thus the concept of transgression, in the context of literature, is brought to the same domain in which Bataille situated the contaminated violence of the ancient sacrifice: the domain of impossibility. Here, the concept of the exigency assumes the full force of its Batillian definition. Its failure of accomplishment is the condition of its affirmation. This movement of expression toward communication is reminiscent of another movement, which represents a point of extreme proximity of Bataille's text to that of Blanchot: the ever-failing movement of the livre toward the fugitive space of the oeuvre: "L'oeuvre est sans pouvoir, impuissante, non pas qu'elle soit le simple revers des formes variées de la possibilité, mais parce qu'elle désigne une région où l'impossibilité n'est plus privation, mais affirmation" (L'Espace littéraire, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 300). Since violence is not a quantity which allows itself to be mobilized, the text fails in its attempt at such a mobilization. But to the extent that the violence of the exigency is a movement which always contaminates the univocal strategy of mobilization itself--to the extent that reification is always incomplete, however absolute its closure--the text affirms.

As a process of creation or as a document, the text is the existing scene of a communication. Within the context of this scene, an exigency toward closure (here a seizure of that which escapes seizure; elsewhere, the multiple forms of the exigency in Bataille's text) is always solidary

with an exigency toward excess. This solidarity demonstrates that excess is a factor which is always-already inscribed in the communicative comportment but never susceptible of inscription by the power to express. On a more general level in Bataille's system, the concept of the text--"communication as failure to express"--may be said to function as a basic model for subjectivity itself and for intersubjectivity. The text is a problematic space of communication in which a certain violence always exceeds the concept of an individual subject from whom communication would emanate or to whom communication would return. Nevertheless, such a space is the only possible field for a subject's fugitive self-coincidence. The effort of this self-coincidence, or the violence of its process, is the being of an exigency. Like the voluntaristic attempt to express, it accomplishes itself in the very moment of its exigency to abolish its own limits. As that scene of this paradoxical effort, the text is a field in which desire would actually precede the identity to self of a desiring subject. In such a field, reification always succeeds too well, and always fails. The exigent subject, whose closure is always excessively complete and yet inachevé, occupies this space in the form of what Bataille will call a glissement. Here, alterity is a condition which has not yet accomplished its entry into existence, and which nevertheless dominates utterly the possibility of communication.

Thus, beyond its empirical conditions, the text will represent a conceptualization of subjectivity prior to its enclosure of itself as identity or ipseity, and a recognition of its necessary failure to abolish, through excess, the imminence of that enclosure.

Such a meditation is already a thinking of intersubjectivity.

Silence and Parole

For the Bataille of L'Expérience intérieure, the word "silence" is an example of a "mot glissant." "Pervers," "poétique," it calls attention to the paradox of its enunciation. "Il est déjà . . . l'abolition du bruit qu'est le mot. . . . Il est lui-même gage de sa mort" (E.I., p. 28). The enunciation of the word is a strangely excessive, violent alteration of the silence it would inscribe in the discourse. The function of the word as expression is radically compromised by the paradox of its reference. "Le silence est un mot qui n'est pas un mot et le souffle un objet qui n'est pas un objet . . ." (E.I., p. 29).

Bataille's fascination with the word "silence" indicates a subordination of the privilege of silence itself to that of a paradoxical inscription. The perfection of silence is contaminated by the sound of a word whose own transitivity is placed in question by its very movement. The word is thus a perverse betrayal of both silence and the abolition of silence. This perversity is poetry, as La Littérature et le mal demonstrates. Inscription is the perversity of a paradoxical movement between two poles which prevent each other from accomplishing their entry into existence: silence and the communicable, transitive word. Silence cannot affirm itself. The word cannot affirm the sovereignty of silence. The sound of the word affirms its own contaminated reference to a powerless presence-absence over which this reference has, nevertheless, no power.

The Parole (word) is a sound which is its own abolition. But the axis of this abolition must be the word's own reference, and this

reference is a betrayal of itself. The word is the promise of its own death, the movement of its own abolition. But this abolition never comes to pass. Instead, in the field we have called inscription, the word persists, in the form of a stubbornly imminent closure whose finality or totalization is prevented by the fact that such a totalization would be the abolition of closure itself. Such a word, which affirms simultaneously its own closure and the excess of that closure, is a glissement.

Bataille says that the subject is "la même chose que le langage." Indeed, from the perspective of inscription, subjectivity is the exigency of an enunciation which can neither accomplish itself nor silence itself. Subjectivity is an excess, a dépense, a transgression, whose paradoxical mobilization is always a closure, a reification, a prohibition. Subjectivity is a silence in the form of a word; an exigency whose form is the impossibility of its totalization; an entry into being which is its own imminent abolition: "lui-même gage de sa mort."

The privilege of the word over silence in a fragment of L'Expérience intérieure is the aphoristic equivalent of Bataille's more painstaking approach to the question of literature. Both meditations lead to the affirmation of a new value, that of a word which does not express silence, does not give a sovereign voice to silence, but rather contaminates silence in the domain of impossibility, whose name is la communication. Inscription is a communication among identities which can never accomplish their own closure, but whose very incompleteness is a problematic, insistent exigency of closure which makes impossible the

explosive negativity of transcendent excess. It is in this sense that we may understand the apparently casual metaphor, "le sacrifice est un roman." In its failure to destroy limits, the sacrifice finds itself to be a violation as mise en jeu, a contamination rather than an abolition. The empirical taking of life or destruction of goods is not the accomplishment of that which was attempted, but rather a proximity, at the extreme of the possible, of transgression and its perennial complement, prohibition. The interdit does not disappear with the victim, and this is why the victim is la part maudite. Transgression sacrifices that which cannot be sacrificed, as does literature. The word, in its way, is communication's part maudite. Its density is the very axis of the ceremony which would abolish it. The failure of abolition to take place is the inscription of transgression into the domain of impossible communication. The sacré is this communication. Literature is the heir to a contamination.

The global concept of the text in Bataille designates a communication which takes place in the problematic space of subjectivity's self-coincidence. The process of inscription which conditions this paradoxical unicity suggests that, in Blanchot's words, "la possibilité n'est pas la seule dimension de notre existence" (A.P., p. 307). It is now necessary for us to ask: How may a process of closure or totalization whose modality is not that of possibility imply a passage from silence to the word? Under what conditions may subjectivity speak? What are the conditions for an entretien?

Communication and Intersubjectivity

Ce n'est pas en tant que chose définie que l'homme se heurte à la nature. . . . C'est comme effort d'autonomie. (E., p. 376)

This formulation, proposed in the aphoristic context of Le Coupable, may be understood as a principal moment of Bataille's approach to the problem of subjectivity. It describes an intuition that the being of subjectivity must be thought in strategic isolation from the basic notion of its self-coincidence or identity. The many discursive movements and contexts which comprise the Bataillian corpus may be said to organize themselves in relation to this fundamental exigency. The inequality and the frequent hyperbole of their elaboration are the result of a discursive practice which gives value to the generalized notion of excess or violence, without immediately situating this value in terms of its conditions of possibility. This initial gesture characterizes most of Bataille's early essays, and it is present, as we have seen, in his mature work as well. But the development of a more patient theoretical practice which begins with "La Notion de dépense" and "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (1933-4) is founded upon a recognition that violence is always conditioned by ineluctable limits. Dépense will always make its fugitive appearance in a world governed necessarily by production and conservation. Heterogeneity will always accomplish a momentary disruption which is immediately recuperated by a homogeneous world. The work of the Bataillian text is then concentrated upon an endlessly repeated articulation of the concepts of excess and constraint which ultimately shows them to be conditioned by each other. Violence will no longer function as the

transcendent explosion of excess, but will be shown to condition the process of closure itself. From this perspective, violence may be patiently extricated from its initial context of subversion, and closure may be perceived as something more, or something other, than simple constraint. The condition for such a discursive practice is, as we have seen, a problematization of the notion of possibility. It is within the context of such a problematization that the concepts of dépense and transgression come to designate, beyond their initial definitions as comportments of rituals, a subjectivity which is itself defined as an exigency or mise en jeu.

Among the figures which appear for the description of such a mise en jeu are a homogeneity rendered intense in its closure by the conditioning priority of heterogeneity ("La Structure psychologique du fascisme"); a discontinuity defined paradoxically as its opposite, continuity (L'Erotisme); a dépense problematically mobilized as the very notion of utility (La Part maudite); a non-savoir which conditions and immediately compromises the reifications of a profane savoir (L'Expérience intérieure); a prohibition whose most basic predicate is transgression itself. It is the discursive mise en jeu of these ostensible opposites--the compression of irreconcilable concepts into the strangely intimate space of mutual conditioning--which defines subjectivity as an exigency of closure whose force is that very excess which threatens closure.

Thus, in Bataille's text, the most basic instance of transgression is the stubborn, exigent enclosure of a subject by himself. Transgression is subjectivity's violent effort to incarnate itself as the

immobility of an identity to self. This process of incessantly imminent closure, perceived paradoxically by the Bataillian subject as the intemporal substance of his integrity, is the expérience. Such a closure does not accomplish itself in the realm of the possible. The many comportments which are defined as transgression in Bataille's text all result in a certain "failure," because transgression considered as power always assaults a limit which is itself discovered to be an exigency other than a constraint: the exigency of transgression itself, the exigency of the subject as expérience. Blanchot, in the initial pages of his reading of this concept, will immediately perceive the violence of its paradox, and will speak of the ostensibly integral self as being "en repos dans le devenir de sa totalité immobile" (A.P., p. 304). Following this, and strategically imagining the self and its works as totalizations, he will describe the expérience as "le désir de l'homme sans désir" (A.P., p. 304). Blanchot's own categories, or perhaps more fundamentally, his attitude toward the problem of categories themselves in their necessity and their impossibility, allows him to perceive that the totality hides an inachèvement which is the very condition of totalization: the imminence and the incompletion of its identity to itself.

Against the background of such an incompletion, designated in Bataille's text by such terms as expérience, inachèvement, glissement, mise en jeu, etc., subjectivity may be defined in its separation only by an implication of communication. From this perspective, Bataille's statement that "l'humanité n'est pas faite d'êtres isolés, mais d'une communication entre eux" (L.M., p. 235) is not hyperbolic: It reflects

the necessary consequences of a notion of subjectivity as exigency. The violence of an exigency toward closure is already the excess of an opening: impossible communication which does not rupture barriers in the triumph of a communion, but which functions as the possibility of barriers themselves. "Cette communication incessante dont, jusque dans le fond de la solitude, nous sentons l'absence" (L.M., p. 235), is a communication rendered inevitably present and absent by the ineluctable but never-yet-complete totalization of the self. Always incapable of communication, the absence of communication being the very condition of its integrity, in the very moment of a closure which will silence communication forever, the self communicates.

It is this expérience, which joins silence paradoxically and necessarily to the fugitive appearance of the word, that Blanchot describes in a brilliant paragraph which prepares his discussion of the entretien:

Ce que nul existant ne peut atteindre dans la primauté de son nom, ce que l'existence même dans la séduction de sa particularité fortuite, dans le jeu de son universalité glissante, ne saurait contenir, ce qui échappe donc décidément, la parole l'accueille, et non seulement elle le retient, mais c'est à partir de cette affirmation toujours étrangère et toujours dérobée, l'impossible et l'incommunicable, qu'elle parle y prenant origine, [. . .] disant alors l'exigence ultime.

L'expérience est cette exigence, elle n'est que comme exigence et telle qu'elle ne se donne jamais pour accomplie. . . . (A.P., pp. 312-13)

The expérience which brings silence to the domain of the word is a communication which cannot be described as a value, a necessity, an absence, or a possibility. Situated behind, or underneath, and escaping the discursive limits of these categories, communication is the central space of tension to which Bataille's multiple strategies lead. It

is the space, also, of his entretien with Maurice Blanchot, and of the entretien in general.

Proximity and the "Entretien"

The ground upon which subjectivity closes itself, imminently and permanently from all possible communication--the ground upon which intersubjectivity is about to become a final impossibility--is called "la communication." This closure is not to take place. It is to persist, paradoxically, as an imminence. (Indeed, subjectivity itself, and with it communication, are not totalities which will have the power to take place, in the sense of an accession to the realm of existence. The elaboration of this problematic is a major movement of "L'Affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative," and requires an interpretation of its own.)

As Blanchot says, the ultimate effort of the Bataillian subject to coincide with himself forever, or to die, or both--strategically is considered as a punctual moment--as a parole speaks impossibility itself, the ultimate exigency. Blanchot's statement, clearly is not made in a context of empirical reference. Men speak, their words have physical substance and resonate in a field of comprehension. But the word interrogated ontologically by Blanchot is rather the question of the possibility of a being who speaks, who must speak, and who cannot speak, in a single moment. The word is an ontological predicate of such a subject considered in his totality. Thus, when Bataille speaks of an intersubjective encounter, or when Blanchot pursues his

interpretation of Bataille's system as a whole, it is less an encounter which is being mediated than the condition for an encounter. It is against this background that the concept of a spoken word or an intersubjective presence must be examined.

The parole, considered most basically, is a form of the breach which always haunts the ineluctable closure of the subject. Neither transitive nor intransitive, it is the modality of an inachèvement. It is a problematic escape from within an absolute closed surface. Its modality is not to take place, but rather to haunt the surface as a paradoxical condition of its very closure. Bataille will speak of such a contamination in terms of a nudity or a wound: "Par ce qu'on peut nommer inachèvement, animale nudité, blessure, les divers êtres séparés communiquent, prennent vie en se perdant dans la communication de l'un à l'autre" (C., p. 263). The nudity of a surface whose integral purity is not sufficient as a description of its paradoxically incomplete impenetrability, will be a wound at the same time that it is an integral totality. Blanchot will speak of this wound as a "mouvement d'excéder qui fait que l'achèvement serait encore et toujours inachevé" (A.P., p. 307); an "event," "qui n'appartient pas à la possibilité," which "ouvre en l'être achevé un infime interstice" (A.P., p. 307). This inachèvement may not be conceived as the authentic breach of an emission, but rather as that brute failure of closure to accomplish itself, to which Emmanuel Levinas refers when he asks: "La subjectivité ne signifie-t-elle pas précisément de par son incapacité de s'enfermer du dedans?"³ This "incapacity," this "wound," this "nudity" which contaminates the perfection of the closed surface, is the fact of

impossibility itself, as it conditions subjectivity. Considered as a punctual escape, it is a parole. Considered more generally as the possibility of intersubjectivity, it may perhaps be best described by a term long associated with Levinas. This term is "proximity."

Inachèvement, the denudation of an impeccable closure, is proximity.

"L'exposition s'expose; la sincérité met à nu la sincérité même. Il y a dire."⁴ Thus Emmanuel Levinas formulates the concentration of proximity which is the parole. Bataille will write that "l'existence humaine n'est en nous, en ces points où périodiquement elle se noue, que langage crié, que spasme cruel, que fou rire" (L.M., p. 235). This is the dire: a pre-voluntary "emission" which is not yet the emission of a message, not yet a relation to an Other, but rather the very violence of a movement of closure. This dire is always immediately a dit: the mastery of a code, the free will of speech, the integrity of the énoncé in a context of reification. But it is also, and necessarily, a mot glissant: the inscription in the discourse of a parole which contaminates the very closure it makes possible. Between the voluntary and the involuntary, between free will and its absence in a world of determination (in a world of totalities), the process of inscription takes place. It introduces a profane discourse in which "aussitôt," as Blanchot writes, "quelque chose de démesuré est en jeu" (J.P., p. 314).

Il faut en quelque sorte que les dés de la parole retombent, obéissant à la gravité qui rend les mots nécessaires, pour que les dés soient jetés, et c'est la retombée même--l'échéance--qui, se transformant en une chute illimitée, coïncide avec l'élan capable de provoquer la chance. (J.P., p. 321n.)

Reification is the inevitable context of the exigency as dire: the

context of a must and a cannot which defines communication. The démesure which articulates the dire and the dit in this paradoxical compression of excess and closure, which defines all inscription as a glissement, is the Bataillian rire:spasme cruel. The rire is the spasm of la chance, always, as Blanchot says, "en attente dans la réserve du discours familier" (J.P., p. 314). It is a fundamental figure of the contaminated intentionality of the dire, the movement of a closure which is its own mise en jeu. Bataille will define this movement as a flight which will paradoxically animate intentionality: "Et ce mouvement de ma pensée qui me fuit, non seulement je ne puis l'éviter, mais il n'est pas d'instant si secret qu'il ne m'anime" (E.I., p. 149).

The description of an intersubjective presence which would be informed by the multiple movements we have been following in Bataille's text is never attempted by Bataille himself in a discursive context. It is to be found in the ironic, difficult movements of his fictional text. It is probable, however, that any systematic reading of that fictional text would find itself immediately intricately with the brilliant formulations of Maurice Blanchot's "Le Jeu de la pensée." In this essay, Blanchot describes the idea of an entretien with Georges Bataille: an empirical conversation, the implications of such a conversation for the concept of an entretien in general, and ultimately a more fundamental dialogue which brings into intense proximity the texts of both thinkers.

Intersubjectivity is, as we have seen, the implication of a parole which is not the production of an integral self, but rather the

production of the failure of such a totalization. This parole is not a production, but rather the im-possibility of production in general. It cannot be internalized by a second self which would receive this production and comprehend it in the transitivity of a profane language. Such a configuration seems to take place empirically--the transitive discourse is "possible," the "possible" exists--but Bataille raises the question of the possibility of the "possible." Blanchot, who attempts to describe the presence of a parole between two interlocutors, recognizes that this presence exceeds--is the excess of--the two ostensible particularities. It is proximity itself, and is beyond deliberate emission and reciprocal comprehension: "Ce qui est présent dans cette présence de parole, des qu'elle s'affirme, c'est précisément ce qui ne se laisse jamais voir ni atteindre: quelque chose est là, qui est hors de portée (aussi bien de celui qui le dit que de celui qui l'entend); c'est entre nous, cela se tient entre, et l'entretien est l'abord à partir de cet entre-deux, distance irréductible . . ." (J.P., p. 315).

Proximity is an entre-deux a face-à-face in which communication "exceeds without the irreducible but incomplete particularity of the interlocutors. The transitive, communicable dit which enters the space Bataille called a glissement--the space in which separation becomes proximity--becomes, in Blanchot's words, tragic, suspended "la chose dite entre en rapport avec sa différence, devient plus aiguë, plus tragique, non pas plus unifiée, mais au contraire suspendue tragiquement entre deux pôles d'attraction" (J.P., p. 318). Suspended between poles of attraction which are never able to coincide with themselves

individually (since this failure of self-identity is the parole itself), the dit itself is always a glissement, a failure of the communicable to be communicable. This expanding resonance of the term "glissement" is rendered with extraordinary acuity in the following formulation, which introduces the central term of Blanchot's interpretation, and perhaps of L'Entretien infini as a whole: "Plutôt qu'un dialogue, il faudrait le nommer parole plurielle, si celle-ci, dans sa simplicité, est la recherche d'une affirmation qui, bien qu'échappant à toute négation, n'unifie pas et ne se laisse pas unifier, toujours renvoyant à une différence toujours plus tentée de différer" (J.P., p. 319).

This is the glissement: a difference which can never differentiate sufficiently, but which nevertheless governs, in its incessant movement, the fugitive unicity of the interlocutors and their communication. Alterity, in the context of such a parole plurielle, is not simply the rectitude of the Other who would stand before me. Prior to such a presence and making it possible is the more basic alterity of the parole itself, which, as the strange presence of an incompleteness, is the only unicity of the interlocutors. Such an alterity, which is a mise en jeu of identity even as it founds a paradoxical proximity, is a parole beyond comprehension which makes possible comprehension itself. This other of comprehension, which is recognized in Bataille's text as non-savoir is given the name "oubli": "Ce qui caractérise donc cette sorte de dialogue, c'est qu'il n'est pas seulement un échange de paroles entre deux Moi, deux hommes en première personne, mais que l'Autre y parle dans cette présence de parole qui est sa seule présence,

parole neutre, infinie, sans pouvoir, où se joue l'illimité de la pensée, sous la sauvegarde de l'oubli" (J.P., p. 320).

Thus, the possibility of intersubjectivity, as it is implicitly elaborated in the many unequal movements of the Bataillian text, is correctly read by Blanchot as a notion founded by its own mise en jeu. The integrity of the communicating subject is conditioned by its own incompleteness; the transitivity of the word rests paradoxically upon its status as a glissement; the engulfing process of comprehension masks an oubli which is "le maître du jeu" (J.P., p. 317); and, most fundamentally, the power to communicate and the solidity of the communicable develop their momentum in the domain which most compromises their transitivity: the domain of impossibility. The inscription of "la chance" in the dialogue is the inscription of the exigency in the overall context of intersubjectivity. The parole, as it conditions the dialogue, makes of the dialogue a parole plurielle.

"L'expérience ne peut être communiquée si des liens de silence, d'effacement, de distance, ne changent pas ceux qu'elle met en jeu" (E.I., p. 41). Thus Bataille, in an aphorism charged once again with the imperative and with the language of power, pursues his perennial effort to pose the question of communication's exigency; a question which always exceeds the terms of its elaboration. In this case, his strategy takes the form of an introduction of barriers to communication--silence, effacement, distance--which are posited as the very conditions of communication, in a context beyond possibility.

In addition, the density of Bataille's formulation, with its reference to a mise en jeu which would change the subjects of communication, repeats a perennial concern with the question of intimacy or

proximity as it relates to the notion of a dialogue. It is perhaps this movement, more than any other, that has made Bataille's readers ill at ease, and has perpetuated (perhaps desirably) the marginal status of Bataille's text in recent European thought. During his lifetime, the notion of impossibility, in its application to the integrity of a communicating subject, was not accessible to a reading whose preoccupations were interiority and alterity. Today, his concept of a subjectivity which retains a paradoxical unicity, and an intersubjectivity which implies a problematic intimacy, are not easily accessible to a reading whose preoccupation is the abolition of a humanist subject through the explosive transcendence of transgression. In either epoch, it seems, it is the implacable insistence of Bataille's notion of impossibility that causes his readers to hesitate in their claims for his text. Against this background, the proximity of Blanchot's statements to Bataille's questions is extreme, and recalls by its acute compression the near-opacity of Blanchot's own text to both traditions. How, indeed, could it have been possible for the description of a silent, nocturnal anonymity, conceived as the only possibility of communication and comprehension, to be accepted as a pertinent form of interrogation by a tradition preoccupied with its own hesitation between the solidity and the dissolution of a personal subject? At either extreme, the insistence of an impersonality which must nevertheless constitute the unicity of a subject would be a tangential problematization, an interruption of the possibility of the subject's self-coincidence disappearance.

"Entre deux hommes parlant, liés par l'essentiel, l'intimité non familière de la pensée établit une distance et une proximité sans mesure"

(J.P., pp. 321-2). Thus Blanchot describes the dizzying movement of a glissement which defines communication as the problematic entre-deux of an imminent communion and an imminent alterity which will never take place. The space of such a paradoxical but ineluctable intimacy is the space of proximity. This intimacy is not familiar. "Liés par l'essentiel, pourtant ils ne sont pas ensemble, puisque, à proprement parler, là où ils sont, il n'y a pas d'ensemble possible" (J.P., p. 319). The proximity of the parole is "une entente qui s'approfondit sans cesse, cependant sans accord" (J.P., p. 319). The lack of an ensemble or an accord which must nevertheless designate an intimacy, an entente, is endlessly repeated negative stipulation which attempts to extricate the entretien from the context of the duality communion/alterity, into which it is incessantly plunged by the language of power. The repetition of such strategies may be the only possibility for a language which places in question the axis of its own interrogation.

The intimacy of the parole, then, will be an "intimité non personnelle" (J.P., p. 322), conceived as the only possibility of a personal encounter. Silence, absence, distance were conditions posited by Bataille for this intersubjective presence. The play of the parole plurielle in Blanchot's reading of Bataille concentrates itself in a paragraph such as the following, in which the writer's attention to the multiple resonances of his terms is extreme:

Et pourtant cette non-familiarité que préserve l'étrangeté dans la parole, est aussi l'intimité de la pensée, et elle passe par cette intimité abrupte, silencieuse, je veux dire implicite, destinée à ouvrir entre deux interlocuteurs, dans l'espace connu et fréquentable, un autre espace où les possibilités habituelles se dérobent. Cet espace autre qu'ouvre l'intimité non familière de la pensée, est celui de l'attention. . . . L'attention est entre l'un et l'autre: le centre de

rencontre, le signe de cet entre-deux qui rapproche en séparant. . . . Elle est une profonde absence, parfois creusée douloureusement, à partir de laquelle et coïncidant avec elle peut s'affirmer la présence de parole. Attention impersonnelle, en ce sens qu'elle n'est l'attention de personne, mais l'attente même de ce qui est en jeu, par la parole, entre ceux qui sont là. (J.P., p. 316)

The entretien is an encounter in which two interlocutors whose very separation is always an imminence, enter into a proximity which is the very effort of that separation. The parole which establishes itself between two such interlocutors is the imminence of a communication which will never resolve itself into an expression. This imminence, perceived in the empirical dialogue as expression or comprehension itself, is, in Blanchot's words, an attente and an oubli which paradoxically conditions the "here and now."

In Bataille's text, we know the strange suspension of the entre-deux as a glissement, or as a mise en jeu whose momentum leads not to a resolution but to a "dernier degré de la tension" (L'Expérience intérieure) which is communication itself. For Blanchot, this suspension is an eternal attention whose resolution is impossible. His reading of Bataille--certainly the most proximate of all readings attempted--is not only the pertinence of an interpretation, but also the tension of a parole plurielle which suspends the question of intersubjectivity between two of the most basic theoretical texts of our time.

Notes

¹Paris: Gallimard, 1969. References to "L'Affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative" (originally published as "L'Expérience-limite" in La Nouvelle Revue Française no. 118 [August 1962], 577-92)

and "Le Jeu de la pensée" (Critique, no. 195-6 [September 1963], will follow the pagination of L'Entretien infini. References to L'Expérience intérieure and Le Coupable will follow the pagination of Volume V of Bataille's Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1973). The following abbreviations will be used: A.P. ("L'Affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative . . ."); J.P. ("Le Jeu de la pensée"); E.I. (L'Expérience intérieure); C. (Le Coupable); E. (L'Erotisme 10/18, 1965); L.M. (La Littérature et le mal, Gallimard "Idées," 1957).

²See La Part maudite (Paris: Minuit "points," 1965), especially Chapter 4.

³"Sans identité." Humanisme de l'autre homme (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972), p. 92.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In concluding my reading of Bataille's works and the placing into play of the key concepts in the Bataillian universe, I would like to focus on the Bataille-system. This is most easily demonstrated by the interplay of the interior-exterior flux generated from Bataille's texts as well as by various critical exchanges with Bataille among major contemporary critics such as Derrida and Foucault. This Bataille-system subsists in a universe which privileges neither a particular concept nor a rigidly fixed hierarchy of concepts, and which especially avoids systematization and categorization, and insists on the dissolution of all genre distinctions, including the one between theory and fiction.

Theory being a "writing" (Nietzsche has sufficiently insisted on this point) is a part of literature, and belongs equally in the domain of fiction. These terms, consequently, are able to exchange their attributes, especially when the object of the quest is the impossible, the inexpressible. This is why we should not be astonished in seeing Bataille pass indifferently from theory to the récit and from the récit to theory, solely in the function of a basis of departure appearing to him more objective or more subjective, or as an instinctual tendency bearing on one terrain rather than on another. In any

case--and this is the main point--the same quest is accomplished exactly, which always finishes by overlapping whatever framework is given. All genres betray, all frameworks are too narrow and limiting. No genre, in any case, guarantees, nor permits one to arrive at the essential better than another. We can say that the philosopher Nietzsche is more of a poet than many poets, and the poet Blake more of a philosopher than many philosophers, as Bataille states in La Littérature et le mal:

"Blake ne fut en aucune mesure un philosophe, mais il a prononcé l'essentiel avec une vigueur et même avec une précision que la philosophie peut lui envier" (L.M., p. 105).¹ Literature is like philosophy, in that they are both prisons which confine writing and take away its own necessity. Bataille states in a parenthesis in La Part maudite: "l'intérêt qu'on attribue d'habitude à mes livres est d'ordre littéraire et ce dut être inévitable: on ne peut en effet les classer dans un genre à l'avance défini" (P.M., p. 49). It is evident that Bataille only accepts with reserve and lassitude any definition, any classification of his work. On this point he lingers at great length, indicating the domineering necessity which leads him ceaselessly to mix literature and philosophy. It is clear in fact that what is at first the most striking feature in Bataille's texts, is, on the one hand, the subject matter of his philosophical texts and, on the other hand, the commentaries which constantly traverse his récits. Sade is here the precursor for this notion of permeability of which Philippe Sollers writes: "Ce qui n'a pas été pardonné à Sade, c'est peut-être moins l'apologie explicite du crime du plaisir, que d'avoir osé rendre le discours perméable à l'élément qui, par un statut

intérieur au langage, passait pour ne pas pouvoir être dit."² But the question is that of the impossible, and according to Bataille: "l'impossible, il est sûr, ne peut être défini" (O.C., t.III, p. 512). Also in Sade's image, Bataille proposes to "lier au développement de la pensée la plus complète liberté possible. (Je ne crois pas pouvoir me proposer de résultat plus décisif que celui de lier au développement de la pensée la plus complète liberté possible. Mais j'ai conscience que cela est précisément s'opposer à la conclusion normale de tout effort intellectuel et j'ai été amené ainsi à m'engager dans des voies répugnantes)" (O.C., t.III, p. 127), to link in spite of their fundamental incompatibility, art and philosophy, and he later states: "En principe, rien n'est plus étranger à la philosophie que l'oeuvre d'art. Une oeuvre philosophique a l'ambition de donner une représentation intelligible de la valeur universelle s'opposant à l'aspect immédiat des choses dont l'intelligibilité n'est pas donnée et que la particularité rend en apparence irréductible" (O.C., t.IV, pp. 3986-7). And if he makes this proposal, and if he applies it effectively in his writings, he is experiencing the "besoin d'unir à l'accomplissement espéré d'un échafaudage philosophique celui d'une oeuvre où l'incohérence de toutes choses serait aussi bien reflétée . . ." (O.C., t.IV, p. 397), that he must "parvenir à cet exposé d'une philosophie qui serait en même temps une oeuvre d'art" (O.C., t.IV, p. 397). But, this enterprise is inevitably doomed to failure: "Je sais que l'une et l'autre qualité seront déniées au résultat . . ." (O.C., t.IV, p. 397). This question of genres, however, is so unavoidable that Bataille contradicts himself, claiming art sometimes: "Si mon exposé est une oeuvre

d'art, c'est que j'ai conscience, en l'écrivant, de ce qui, parce que je l'écris, se passe en moi: cet exposé me met en jeu personnellement, c'est le moment d'aboutissement de toute ma vie" (O.C., t.IV, p. 397), and sometimes refusing it: "Ce que nous avons entrepris ne doit être confondu avec rien d'autre, ne peut pas être limité à l'expression d'une pensée et encore moins à ce qui est justement considéré comme art" (O.C., t.I, p. 442). But what is important is in the effective fusion, in the interior of Bataille's texts, of genres a priori different, separated, if not opposed. What is important is that his writing obeys a movement, for Bataille's writing is one of intensity. Now intensity is not only density, it equally implies movement. What is of utmost importance is that his writing measures itself against the unthinkable, against death. Michel Foucault demands that today's query bear on "ce langage qui n'est pas achevé ni sans doute maître de soi, bien qu'il soit pour nous souverain et qu'il nous surplombe de haut, s'immobilisant parfois dans des scènes qu'on a coutume d'appeler 'érotiques' et soudain se volatilissant dans une turbulence philosophique où il semble perdre jusqu'à son sol."³

In his radical aversion to all defined genre, in his categorical refusal of all exclusive modes, Bataille has recourse to multiplication, as well as to reduction of writing. If he rejects genres, it is in fact less in order to carry out their synthesis (which is what happens in the last texts of Blanchot) than to carry out their transgression (this junction is more fragmented in Bataille's texts and leads to heterogeneity). The transgression of languages and genres explains the multiplicity of writings and the fact that each serves in the end

to question the other, others, all others. When, in these conditions, Bataille sometimes expresses a regret, stating in particular that he is not a true philosopher, although he has always been disposed to philosophy, approaching it, distancing himself from it, but never being able to adhere to philosophical discourse except in fleeting instants. The essential of Bataille is in this distance, in this irreducible breach which takes form as much by its relation to literature as by that of philosophy. Bataille is nowhere, this is certain. But without a specific place, he is everywhere. His utopia permits him this rare amplitude of language that he has, and also, at the same time, the elaboration of a unique thought--unique in that which it is independent of all literary or philosophical norms, in that which its rigor comes only from its internal cohesion and from its own force. Whatever the appearances may be, Bataille's texts always say the same and question it with as much rage as lucidity. Bataille himself states in a Preface to Madame Edwarda: "J'écrivis ce petit livre en septembre-octobre 1941, juste avant Le Supplice, qui forme la seconde partie de L'Expérience intérieure. Les deux textes, à mon sens, sont étroitement solidaires et l'on ne peut comprendre l'un sans l'autre" (O.C., t.III, p. 491). He specifies in addition that there are some regrettable grounds of expediency which have hindered their common publication, indicating how much, from the interior, the question of sharing is not posed, even if fiction, in the circumstance of Madame Edwarda, has had the decisive role, being the first gesture of writing. We could also consider in an identical fashion a change of title such as the one which becomes Haine de la poésie L'Impossible, and conclude that what

is important is neither the title, nor the genre, but in what manner Bataille intervenes in the genre, in what manner his writing accommodates itself by it (or does not accommodate itself by it). What matters is in what manner Bataille accomplishes his self-willed work--his undermining work--in all domains that he traverses, in all known places where he happens to pass--domains and places where, with a shuffling of cards, an erasing of names, Bataille returns to the unknown.

If we take for example, Bataille's fictional texts, what do we notice? At first, undoubtedly, the mad dramatization which is produced there--mad, but the same, assuredly as the one which is in the work in whatever fundamental experience there may be. Dramatization is an intensification and the means of emerging from oneself. It is, in fact, one of the paths of interior experience and the principal interest, the essential quality of all fiction worthy of this name (that which precisely causes it to be experience). Dramatization being and permits (is able to permit) therefore communication, as Bataille notes in Sur Nietzsche: "Me servant de fictions, je dramatise l'être: j'en déchire la solitude et dans le déchirement je communique" (S.N., p. 157). Bataille's literature, especially the most erotic, is not a literature of intimacy, but rather one of raging thunderstorm and of blood. In the furor of the elements, in the great wind, nature breaks out and bursts forth in Bataille's récits. A theater of desire is edified there opening writing to the extreme, making it reply to the appeal of the impossible. Where, far from compromising himself in the novel, Bataille is moved, as Barthes says, into an "essence d'imaginaire," ". . . Bataille ne se compromet en rien dans le roman,

qui s'accommode par définition d'un imaginaire partiel, dérivé et impur (tout mêlé de réel); it ne se meut, bien au contraire, que dans une essence d'imaginaire."⁴ For it is the substance of the imaginary, it is the imaginary which appears in these violent récits, in these paroxysmal scenes, in these dense words. And it is this pure imaginary which defines the rupture between récit and novel (a rupture which is no less important than that of the interior experience of philosophy). It is a rupture which leads to this paradoxical conclusion that everything is imaginary (non realistic), but nothing, at the inner core of the récit, can be imaginary. Blanchot has already remarked in regard to Sade's books: ". . . l'érotisme de Sade est un érotisme de rêve, puisqu'il ne se réalise la plupart du temps que dans la fiction; mais plus cet érotisme est rêvé, plus il exige une fiction d'où le rêve soit banni, où la débauche soit réalisée et vécue. . . ." ⁵

Against this realism, it concerns Bataille, therefore, to indicate the extreme, to tell the truth of the extreme--this truth which can only be contiguous in dramatization and in excess as Bataille has stated: "Le réalisme me donne l'expression d'une erreur. La violence seule échappe au sentiment de pauvreté de ces expériences réalistes" (O.C., t.III, p. 101). In the rarified atmosphere of Bataille's fictions, in their uncertain temporality, arise emptiness and death--an emptiness and death which introduce scandal, which are scandal. It is not so much eroticism which shocks in Bataille's récits as the emptiness that it reveals, as the death that it unveils, finally, as the nonsense that it manifests. This nonsense which causes, for example, in Madame Edwarda, a woman, God, a hole, and anguish to be

joined together, and which causes the narrator to write: "Elle était noire, entièrement, simple, angoissante comme un trou . . ." (O.C., t.III, p. 24). It is this deep nonsense that takes him to the encounter with this woman of the impossible: "J'allai vers elle: elle semblait folle, évidemment venue d'un autre monde . . ." (O.C., t.III, p. 25). It is that which causes him to say again: "Je sus alors--toute ivresse en moi dissipée--qu'Elle n'avait pas menti, qu'Elle était DIEU" (O.C., t.III, p. 24). This is a nonsense devoid of all gratuity in the manner that the place left vacant by God is also that to which the experience of sexuality accedes. Simply stated, this place that God occupied steadfastly is found in the experience of sexuality. Madame Edwarda takes directly its true tone as an overture to the unknown, to death. The key is given from the exergue on, the récit finds itself placed under the sign of Hegel--under the sign of a certain Hegel: the one who writes: "La mort est ce qu'il y a de plus terrible et maintenir l'oeuvre de la mort est ce qui demande la plus grande force" (O.C., t.III, p. 9). In addition to the fact that the récit (that such a récit) would only distort Hegel and the image we normally have of him--but, Bataille asks in the same text: "Comment peut s'exprimer celui qui les fait taire les philosophes, sinon d'une manière qui ne leur est pas concevable?" (O.C., t.III, p. 13)--operates a first transgression, inversely, the récit, for its part, which is placed under the sign of Hegel, is found distorted insofar as it is erotic, and this is indicated in the preface: "transgression inverse, donc, et deuxième transgression." This transgression of philosophy by that which is foreign to it (a transgression that Nietzsche had initiated

with his Zarathoustra), this transgression of the récit by that which is the most distant from it, combines a putting into question of the subject, since to the multiplicity of writings is added to the interior of the same text, a multiplication of subjects of writing, i.e., from one fragment to another, from a development to a digression, from a preface to a récit, from a pseudonym to a character. . . . This serves as an introduction to heterogeneity and should not surprise us, as Bataille ceaselessly separates what must be joined and brings together what must be opposed. Sollers justly places the emphasis on this aspect of the work, talking about its obscenity in relation to the "imbrication des niveaux du discours. Dans les romans Madame Edwarda, Histoire de l'oeil, Le Bleu du ciel, L'Abbé C. et, aujourd'hui, Ma mère, l'obscénité est elle-même fonction de cette imbrication des niveaux du discours: la description apparemment la plus 'crue' voisine avec la pensée apparemment la plus 'noble,' le haut et le bas communiquent sans cesse dans la chaîne signifiante courant sous les mot."⁶

Words which should not be joined, sentences perforated with dizziness, scandalous junctions (the récit is that which permits Bataille to link God and Madame Edwarda)--these are just some of the means Bataille uses to speak the impossible, and to favor it for eventual communication. For ". . . à ce point où, conduit par elle, je parvins, à mon tour, je voudrais conduire" (O.C., t.III, p. 28). However, the proper experience of the reader is the necessary condition, the indispensable condition for this communication, as Bataille says: "Ce que je rapporte ne pouvait d'aucune façon être écrit, simplement rapporté, de telle sorte qu'une lecture passive en donne

suffisamment la substance" (O.C., t.III, p. 556). That is why Bataille opposes an abrupt, fractured reading to a smooth one. Apart from all certitude, he leads the reader, by breaches, ruptures, recessions, and advances of the récit, to the greatest bewilderment. Led to the extreme by these repeated disconnections, the reader finds herself or himself face to face with emptiness--an emptiness that nothing in the text will come to fill. The abruptness of certain sentences, and the choice of certain words are like commentaries which intervene in the course of the récits. An example of this can be found in Madame Edwarda, where, after a flashing beginning, a digression crosses and streaks the first page: "Mon entrée en matière est dure . . ." (O.C., t.III, p. 19). Bataille does not choose the path of facility, but that of intransigence. It is necessary to specify here that, if the commentary is rupture, it is also an integral part of the récit. Commentary, in fact, is disconnection that recenters on the essential, as, inversely, repetition of fiction only intensifies the question. Disconnection is there only to better designate the absent center of the writing (that which is beyond all words) and to prove that the essential always is in play in the total commitment of the writer.

Bataille's texts are difficult in that they are abrupt, rugged, deceiving, profoundly non satisfying (closing neither on themselves, nor on the reader, but to the contrary, opening and tearing apart the reader . . .). This occurs in the récits as well as in the philosophical texts. For, there again, Bataille is struggling against the system. Certainly, Bataille knows that we can never entirely escape the system, that we can never extricate ourselves completely from it.

But he does know that sometimes, with effort, we can open it and transgress it. That is why in his savage philosophy, Bataille transgresses philosophy. He prefers to philosophy, that which extracts philosophy from itself. For this purpose, as he refuses specialized tasks, knowing that none can penetrate the depth of things, he refuses to limit himself in a defined vocabulary, as he uses many words in his texts that are not part of the vocabulary of habitual themes in philosophy. In his rejection of established disciplines, the laugh and the mystical, eroticism and the economy are inseparably linked in his works. The breach that these terms maintain among themselves forbids any synthesis, any thorough conscience of the human phenomenon. Bataille utilizes in his texts a writing that does not seem to belong to narrative practice, a writing which spatializes questions and multiplies beginnings. In the space of disconnections, this writing destroys the linearity of discourse at the same time that its globalness is manifested, which leads to the necessity of the fragment in Bataille's works.

Eroticism is for Bataille the indispensable instrument to this transgression of philosophy and its practice. It is in fact the problem of problems as Bataille indicates: "L'érotisme est en nous la part problématique" (E., p. 301), the one which causes man to emerge from himself: "L'érotisme est dans la conscience de l'homme ce qui met en lui l'être en question" (E., p. 34), and the one which makes man leave the domain of reason. Eroticism thus has great significance as to the possibility of transgressing the system of philosophy--on the condition at least that it is not a question of making the "apologie

verbeuse de l'érotisme" (E., p. 289). On the condition, to the contrary, of replying to and obeying its interrogation: "La suprême interrogation philosophique coïncide, je le pense, avec le sommet de l'érotisme" (E., p. 302). We understand from this, that eroticism has a capital role to play from the point of view of the impossible:

"Cet aspect érotique a pour moi une valeur essentielle du point de vue de l'impossible" (O.C., t.III, p. 511). But what is most important, beyond any object of reflection, resides in writing, and in its deviations, which always take precedence over stability in Bataille's works. Philosophy is by principle the domain of the stable and of the definitive, of assured discourse and of recognized words, thus, it would seem the most inappropriate domain for the expression of the impossible.

Jacques Derrida poses the question of the impossible in L'Ecriture et la différence: "Comment, après avoir épuisé le discours de la philosophie, inscrire dans le lexique et la syntaxe d'une langue, la nôtre, qui fut aussi celle de la philosophie, ce qui excède néanmoins les oppositions de concepts dominées par cette logique commune?"⁷ And he answers himself so precisely that we can only cite him at great length: "Ne pouvant ni ne devant s'inscrire dans le noyau du concept lui-même (car ce qui est ici découvert, c'est qu'il n'y a pas de noyau, de sens, d'atome conceptuel, mais que le concept se produit dans le tissu des différences), l'espace qui sépare la logique de maîtrise et, si l'on veut, la non-logique de souveraineté devra s'inscrire dans l'enchaînement ou le fonctionnement d'une écriture. Cette écriture--majeure--s'appellera écriture parce qu'elle excède le logos (du sens, de la maîtrise, de la présence, etc.). Dans cette écriture--celle que recherchait

Bataille--les mêmes concepts, apparemment inchangés en eux-mêmes, subiront une mutation de sens, ou plutôt seront affectés, quoique apparemment impassibles, par la perte de sens vers laquelle ils glissent et s'abîment démesurément" (E.D., p. 392). Derrida pursues again this reflection on the "glissement," noting where Bataille's discourse is trapped, and where philosophy is not able to be recognized: "Le philosophe s'aveugle au texte de Bataille parce qu'il n'est philosophe que par ce désir indestructible de tenir, de maintenir contre le glissement la certitude de soi et la sécurité du concept. Pour lui, le texte de Bataille est piégé: au sens premier du mot, un scandale" (E.D., p. 393). This slipping and sliding, this giving way, this twisting of the discourse--these are assuredly decisive operations. But decisive only in the sense that they come after the System, practicing excess. Decisive also in the sense that they produce this tremor which produces the difference between mastery and sovereignty, a difference that is nothing less than that of meaning. In this regard we may again cite Derrida: "On ne peut même pas dire que cette différence a un sens: elle est la différence du sens, l'intervalle unique qui sépare le sens d'un certain non-sens" (E.D., p. 374). They are decisive in the sense that they submit the concept, the stability of meaning, to an irreversible movement which in the end causes the concept to be much less important than the treatment to which it is submitted. As Derrida states it: "Ici encore, la différence compte plus que le contenu des termes" (E.D., p. 400). Mobility and deviation of concepts lead Bataille elsewhere, bearing more interest on difference than identity and on loss than affirmation, on changing the course

of his route (without affecting anything of his thought) or on introducing untenables: "Allant au fond de l'être, j'introduis d'intenables concepts . . ." (O.C., t.III, p. 55). Placing thusly, not at the level of the concept, but at the level of experience of the concept (of that which plays with certain notions), Bataille, definitively, marks the fundamental and irreducible caesura between philosophy and the interior experience (the edifice of philosophy being forever split, its ground forever rendered to the dangers of the step). Bataille, then, is able to laugh having travelled through and through philosophical space and having transgressed it: ". . . la philosophie, se changeant en une transgression de la philosophie, accède au sommet de l'être" (E., p. 305). He is able to laugh with this laugh which mocks the seriousness of the System as, according to Foucault, it mocks the "identité évidente et bavarde" (Critique 195-196, p. 761) of the subject of philosophy. Bataille wanted to be the philosopher of laughter.

Notes

¹ Georges Bataille, La Littérature et le mal (Paris: Gallimard "Idées," 1967), p. 105. The following abbreviations will be used: L.M. (La Littérature et le mal: Gallimard "Idées," 1967); P.M. (La Part maudite: Minuit "Points," 1967); O.C. (Oeuvres complètes: Gallimard, 1969-83); S.N. (Sur Nietzsche: Gallimard, 1967); E. (L'Erotisme: 10/18, 1965).

² Philippe Sollers, Logiques (Paris: Le Seuil, 1968), p. 85.

³ Michel Foucault, "Préface à la transgression." Critique 195-196 (1963), p. 758.

⁴ Roland Barthes, "Lire Georges Bataille." Critique 195-196 (1963), p. 770.

⁵ Maurice Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade (Paris: 10/18, 1967),
p. 51.

⁶ Sollers, Logiques, p. 159.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, L'Ecriture et la différence (Paris: Le Seuil,
1967), p. 371.

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Cecile Moullé began her academic studies in music at the Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory of Music, and later received a B.M. degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music. She continued her academic studies at the Cleveland State University receiving a B.A. in French with a minor in Spanish in 1972. While enrolled at the Cleveland State University, she also attended courses at Laval University in Quebec City, Université de Dijon, the Sorbonne, and the Universidad de Mexico. In 1974 she received an M.A. in an interdisciplinary program of French and linguistics at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. During 1978-1980, she attended courses at the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois in Urbana, Illinois, while concurrently teaching French and working for a law firm. In 1980 she attended Middlebury College School of French. In July 1984 she submitted her dissertation "Key Concepts in the Theoretical Works of Georges Bataille" to the University of Florida and she received a Ph.D. in romance languages and literatures with philosophy as a second area of study in August of the same year.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



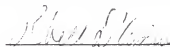
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Professor of Romance Languages
and Literatures

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